

PATRICK
HAMILTON

ROPE

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Rope

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To the Public Danger

The Duke in Darkness

The Man Upstairs

PATRICK
HAMILTON

ROPE



ABACUS

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TO
REGINALD DENHAM

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The Play was first presented by The Repertory Players at the Strand Theatre, 3rd March, 1929

WYNDHAM BRANDON	Sebastian Shaw
CHARLES GRANILLO	Anthony Ireland
SABOT	Frederick Burtwell
KENNETH RAGLAN	Hugh Dempster
LEILA ARDEN	Betty Schuster
SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY	Daniel Roe
MRS. DEBENHAM	Ruth Taylor
RUPERT CADELL	Robert Holmes

The first London West End production was by Reginald Denham at the Ambassadors' Theatre, 25th April, 1929

WYNDHAM BRANDON	Brian Aherne
CHARLES GRANILLO	Anthony Ireland
SABOT	Stafford Hilliard
KENNETH RAGLAN	Patrick Waddington
LEILA ARDEN	Lilian Oldland
SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY	Paul Gill
MRS. DEBENHAM	Alix Frizell
RUPERT CADELL	Ernest Milton

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ACT I

The scene is a room on the first floor of the house in Mayfair shared by BRANDON and GRANILLO. The room is a combination of a study and a drawing-room. It is furnished in a luxurious and faintly bizarre manner and on no discernible model. Nevertheless, there are really many good things about if you care to look for them. At the back, to the right, there are long French windows. To the left of these a fine grandfather clock. Next, against the wall, is a wireless set. Next, a large divan. Door left. Fireplace left.

In the corner, up stage R., is a piano—baby grand. Against wall R., a sideboard, with glasses and drinks on it. Table down R. with a lamp on it. Armchair left of table. Another small table down L., also with armchair. Down stage, in the centre, is a large chest. Red curtains. Red upholstery. The clock, when the curtain rises, stands at eight-forty at night. The action of the play is continuous, and the fall of the curtain at the end of each Act denotes the lapse of no time whatever.

CURTAIN RISES on room completely darkened save for the pallid gleam from lamplight in the street below, which comes through the window. Against this are silhouetted the figures of GRANILLO and BRANDON. They are bending over the chest, intent, working at something—exactly what you cannot discern. The silence is complete. Suddenly the lid of the chest falls with a bang, BRANDON goes over to window and draws the heavy curtains to. Complete black out. They continue whatever they are doing,

BRANDON *murmurs* “All right, all right,” *but there are no other sounds. Pause, BRANDON comes down R., and switches on the light at the little table.*

GRANILLO (*at chest*). Put out that light ! Put out that light !

[Instantly it goes out.

BRANDON (*voice from darkness*). Steady, Granno.

[No reply from other, BRANDON is down right, GRANILLO is somewhere centre. Pause, BRANDON suddenly lights a match and applies it to his cigarette. The cigarette glows in the darkness. He is now seated in the armchair. Pause.

BRANDON. Feeling yourself, Granno ?

[No answer.

BRANDON. Feeling yourself again, Granno ?

[No answer.

BRANDON. Granno.

GRANILLO. Give me some matches.

BRANDON. Matches ? Here you are. Coming. (*He throivs the matches over.*)

[They can be heard rattling in the air and falling on the floor, GRANILLO picks them up and lights his own cigarette. The two pin-points of light are all that come from the darkness. Pause.

It's about time you pulled yourself together, isn't it, Granno ? Sabot will be here in a quarter of an hour.

[Pause.

GRANILLO. You fully understand, Brandon, what we've done ?

BRANDON. Do I know what I've done ? . . . Yes. I know quite well what I've done. (*He speaks in a rich, easy, powerful, elated and yet withal slightly defiant voice.*) I have done murder.

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON (*continuing in same voice*). I have committed murder. I have committed passionless—motiveless—faultless—and clueless murder. Bloodless and noiseless murder.

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. An immaculate murder. I have killed. I have killed for the sake of danger and for the sake of killing. And I am alive. Truly and wonderfully alive. That is what I have done, Granno. (*Long pause.*) What's the matter ? Are you getting superstitious ?

GRANILLO. No. I'm not superstitious.

BRANDON (*suavely*). Then I may put on the light ?

GRANILLO. No. You mayn't. . . .

[Their figures may now be dimly discerned in the faint glow from the fire.]

Brandon ?

BRANDON. Yes ?

GRANILLO. You remember when Ronald came in ? . . .

BRANDON. What do you mean—"when Ronald came in" ?

GRANILLO. When Ronald came in here . . . when he came in from the car. You were standing at the door.

BRANDON. Yes.

GRANILLO. Did you see anyone standing there ? . . . Up the street . . . about seventy yards ?

BRANDON. No.

GRANILLO. There was someone. There was a man. I saw him. I've remembered.

BRANDON. Well, what of it ?

GRANILLO. Oh, nothing. . . . Brandon . . .

BRANDON. Yes ?

GRANILLO. When I met Ronald. When I met him—coming out of the Coliseum—when I met him, and got him into the car—why shouldn't someone have seen us ?

BRANDON. What do you mean by someone ?

GRANILLO. Oh, someone. Anyone. Did we think of that, Brandon ?

BRANDON. I *did*.

[GRANILLO is now seated in armchair L. Pause.]

GRANILLO. It's in the room, you know. Do you think we'll get away with it ?

BRANDON. When ? To-night ?

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. Are you suggesting that some psychic force, emanating from that chest there, is going to advise Sir Johnstone Kentley of the fact that the remains—or shall I say the lifeless entirety—of his twenty-year-old son and heir is contained therein ? (*Pause.*) My dear Granillo, if you are feeling in any way insecure, perhaps I had better fortify you with a brief summary of facts—with mathematics as it were. Let me please give you——

GRANILLO. Listen !

[*There is a tense stillness.*]

BRANDON. What *are* ——?

GRANILLO. Listen, I tell you ! (*Another pause. GRANILLO springs up and goes over to window, where he can be seen peeping through the curtains.*) It's all right. I thought it was Sabot. (*He comes down to chair again.*)

BRANDON. Sabot, in the first place, will not be here until five minutes to nine, if then, for Sabot is seldom punctual. Sabot, in the second place, has been deprived by a wily master of his key. He will therefore ring. Let me, I say, give you a cool narration of our transactions. This afternoon, at about two o'clock, young Ronald Kentley, our fellow-undergraduate, left his father's house with the object of visiting the Coliseum Music Hall. He did so. After the performance he was met in the street by your good self, and invited to this house. He was then given tea, and at six forty-five precisely, done to death by strangulation and rope. He was subsequently deposited in that chest. To-night, at nine o'clock, his father, Sir Johnstone Kentley, his aunt, Mrs. Debenham, and three well-chosen friends of our own will come

round here for regalement. They will talk small talk and depart. After the party, at eleven o'clock . . .

GRANILLO (*interrupting*). This party isn't a slip, is it, Brandon ?

BRANDON. My dear Granno, have we not already agreed that the entire beauty and piquancy of the evening will reside in the party itself? (*Pause.*) At eleven o'clock to-night, I was saying, you and I will leave by car for Oxford. We will carry our fellow-undergraduate. Our fellow-undergraduate will never be heard of again. Our fellow undergraduate will not be murdered. He will be missing. That is the complete story, and the perfection of criminality—the complete story of the perfect crime. (*Pause.*) I am quite lucid—am I not ?

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. The party itself, you see, Granno, so far from being our vulnerable point, is the very apex, as it were, and consummation of our feat. Consider its ingredients. I still don't think we could have chosen better. There will be, first, and by all means foremost, Sir Johnstone Kentley—the father of the—occupant of the chest. It is he, as the father, who gives the entire *macabre* quality of the evening. Well chosen, so far. We then, of course, require his wife ; but she, being an invalid, is unobtainable, and we have procured, instead, his sister. The same thing applies to her.

[*Telephone rings, GRANILLO springs up and goes over to it in the darkness.*]

GRANILLO. Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . Hullo. What ? This is Mayfair X143.. . . What? . . . What? Hullo, (*BRANDON turns up lamp.*) Put out that light ! Put out that light, I tell you ! [*Light goes promptly out.*]

BRANDON. Steady, Granno.

GRANILLO. . . . Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . .

BRANDON. Will you put down that receiver, Granno ? You're telling London you're afraid. (*Pause.*) Come and sit down.

[*GRANILLO puts down receiver and goes over to window and peers out again. Then to door, which he opens. He creeps out*]

into passage. Suddenly a click is heard. He has put on the light in passage, which filters through the door, BRANDON remains motionless. The light goes out again and GRANILLO re-enters the room, shutting the door. He takes his seat again. Slight pause.

GRANILLO. Well, go on.

BRANDON. There are then Kenneth Raglan and Leila Arden. They have been asked for their youth, innocence, and good spirits alone. Also, in Raglan, who went to the same school and is at the same University as ourselves, you have about the most perfect specimen of ordinary humanity obtainable, and therefore a suitable witness to this so extraordinary scene. Unintellectual humanity is represented. The same applies to Leila, his female counterpart. . . . We then come to Rupert. . . . Now in Rupert, Granno, we have a very intriguing proposition. Rupert, in fact, is about the one man alive who might have seen this thing from our angle, that is, the artistic one. You will recall that we even contemplated, at one time, inviting him to share our dangers, and we eventually turned the notion down, not necessarily because it would have been too much for him to swallow intellectually, but simply because he would not have had the nerve. Rupert is a damnably brilliant poet, but perhaps a little too fastidious. . . . He could have invented and admired, but he could not have acted. So he is in the same blissless ignorance as the rest. Nevertheless he is intellect's representative, and valued at that. *(Pause.)* Granno . . .

[No answer. Granno.

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. What's the time ?

GRANILLO *(going up to the clock with a lighted match)*. Ten to.

BRANDON. Sabot will be here in five minutes.

GRANILLO. I know.

BRANDON. May I put on the light ?

GRANILLO. Must you ? Can't you go on talking ?

BRANDON. No, I can't, I'm afraid.

GRANILLO (*pause*). Go on. I'm all right. Put it on. I'm better now.

The little lamp is lit. BRANDON is tall, finely and athletically built, and blond. He is quietly and expensively dressed, with a double-breasted waist-coat, which shows his sturdiness off to the best advantage, and perfectly creased trousers, not turned up at the end, and about nineteen inches in width. His hands are large, and his build is that of the boxer—not the football player or the runner. He has clear blue eyes, a fine mouth and nose, and a rich, competent and really easy voice. He is plainly very well off, and he seems to have used his money in making a fine specimen of himself instead of running to seed. He is almost paternal with everyone he addresses, and this seems to arise from an instinctive knowledge of his own good health, good looks, success and natural calm, as opposed to the harassed frailty of the ordinary human being. This, however, brings him at moments to an air of vague priggishness and self-approbation, and is the one reason why you cannot altogether like him.

GRANILLO is slim, not so tall as BRANDON, expensively and rather ornately dressed in a dark blue suit. He wears a diamond ring. He is dark. A Spaniard. He is enormously courteous—something between a dancing-master and a stage villain. He speaks English perfectly. To those who know him fairly well, and are not subject to Anglo-Saxon prejudices, he seems a thoroughly good sort.

BRANDON, seated in armchair, looks into the light of the lamp, employing himself by fiddling with the shade. GRANILLO walks over to mirror over mantelpiece, looks at himself and adjusts his collar. He takes a cigarette from a box on the mantelpiece. Meanwhile BRANDON has also risen and come over. He does

exactly the same, and is just in time to have his cigarette lit from GRANILLO's match. He puts his arm round GRANILLO as he does this.

BRANDON (*puffs*). Thank you. I thought you were going to lose your nerve for a moment, Granno.

GRANILLO. So did I. But I wasn't.

BRANDON. May I put on the light proper ?

GRANILLO. Yes.

[BRANDON, *humming with a rather strained nonchalance, switches on light by door, and goes out without a word. He can be heard switching on light in hall, GRANILLO remains looking into fire for about thirty seconds, then goes over to sideboard and takes a drink. Suddenly BRANDON returns. His eyes are blazing, and he is pale with rage.*

BRANDON. God, you fool ! Didn't I tell you to check up in there !

GRANILLO. What ?

BRANDON (*holding a slip of blue paper in front of the other*). Look at this ! The boy's Coliseum ticket. It was on the floor. We could hang on that ! What in Heaven's name——

GRANILLO (*with a shrug of the shoulders characteristic of his race*). But, my dear Brandon, you are as much to blame as myself.

BRANDON. That's nothing to do with it ! It's your business to see what I don't see. How in Heaven's name it got there I don't know.

[*A bell rings.*
Damnation ! That's Sabot. Now for God's sake quiet yourself and sit down. All right. I'll go.

[BRANDON *exits. GRANILLO slips blue ticket into his top waistcoat pocket, rushes over to finish drink, seizes book from table, and settles down in armchair R., pretending to read. Pause. Voices from outside, mounting stairs. They arrive outside door.*

SABOT (*off*). In here, sair ?

BRANDON (*off*). Yes, in here.

SABOT. Very good, sair.

[BRANDON *re-enters, closing door behind him. He is just settling down in armchair L., when there is a knock upon the door. He rises quickly and opens it. SABOT, in overcoat, is at door, with a newspaper in hand. He is an alert, very dark little Frenchman, with a long nose and a blueness of cheek which no amount of shaving will eradicate. He is an almost perfect servant—intelligent, alert and obedient, but not, perhaps, completely impersonal—his employers being in the habit of making occasional advances to him. Whoever he is with he has an air of being breathlessly anxious to apologise for something or anything. He is married, quietly ambitious, industrious, and will have a restaurant of his own one of these days.*

SABOT. Ze evening paper, sair ?

BRANDON. Oh—thank you very much, Sabot.

SABOT. I thought you might like to look at it, sair. (*Smiles shyly.*)

BRANDON. Very welcome, Sabot. Many thanks.

SABOT. Not at all, sair.

[BRANDON *closes the door in SABOT's face, and comes down to armchair L. He catches GRANILLO's eye but looks away again. Opens paper.*

BRANDON (*his eyes fixed on paper*). Sorry for my little outburst, Granno. But it rather upset me.

GRANILLO (*eyes fixed on book*). Not at all. You're quite correct. I should have seen it. How it got there I don't know.

BRANDON. Neither do I. What's the time ?

GRANILLO (*comparing wrist-watch with clock*). About five to.

BRANDON. Then we can expect our first guest.

GRANILLO. Yes.

[SABOT enters, carrying large tray. He comes over and deposits it on sideboard. He comes into centre of room and looks first at GRANILLO and then at BRANDON. He addresses BRANDON.

SABOT. Ze table, sair ?

BRANDON (eyes on paper). Yes. That's all right. Lay it there, will you ? We're using the table for books.

SABOT. But I can bring ze table from upstairs, sair ?

BRANDON. Oh, no. That's all right, Sabot. Lay it there.

SABOT. No, sair, it will be no trouble to bring from upstairs.

BRANDON (*suavely*). Nevertheless, Sabot, lay it there, will you ?

SABOT (*a little shamefaced at snub, under his breath*). Very good, sair. (*Goes to sideboard and commences laying cloth, etc., upon chest. There is a long pause.*)

BRANDON (*reading from paper*). Hullo—Hammond at it again. (*Turns over paper to Stop Press.*) 106 Not. . . How many's that, Sabot ?

SABOT. The tenth, sair. (*Pause.*) He was missed at twenty-one, sair.

BRANDON (*again reading*). I'm getting rather tired of Inquests on London Girls. . . . Also of Plucky London Typists' Brave Attempts. . . . Also of Jim and Amy. . . .

[*Bell rings.*

Ah—here we are. He's early, whoever he is.

SABOT. To bring in here, sair ?

BRANDON. Yes—in here.

[SABOT exits.

[GRANILLO rises, goes over to piano, and commences to play "Dance Little Lady" with a rather unpleasant brilliance. He looks significantly at BRANDON while playing. He finishes tune, leaves off, and takes a drink at sideboard. He is now looking quite at ease and pleased with himself. Door opens, SABOT holds it back and KENNETH RAGLAN enters. He is very

young, fair, simple, good-looking, shy, foolish and good. He has no ideas whatever. He still thinks that nightclubs are dens of delight, but that there is probably one girl in the world for him whom he will one day find. His pathetic ideal, in his bearing before the world, is sophistication. To hear him alluding to a “simply staggering binge, old boy,” when he has merely got mildly intoxicated, is to have exemplified at once his sense of humour and wickedness. In the presence of GRANILLO and BRANDON he is merely, of course, tentative and hopeless. He is in evening dress.

RAGLAN (*coming forward nervously*). Hullo.

BRANDON (*taking his hand cordially*). Hullo, Raglan, old man. Come right in. You know Granillo, don't you ?

RAGLAN. Rather.

[He shakes hands with GRANILLO, who has also come forward cordially.]

GRANILLO. Quite a long time since we met, though. (*Smiles.*)

RAGLAN. Yes—isn't it ? (*Looking round nervously.*) I say, I'm terribly sorry. I've come dressed.

BRANDON. My dear fellow, my fault entirely. Come and seat yourself. (*Leads him affectionately to chair.*) I should have explained. You know we're going up to Oxford to-night ?

RAGLAN. Oh, no—are you ? I'm not going up till Friday.

BRANDON. Now what are you going to drink ? You can have Gin and Italian. . . . Or Gin and Angostura. And I can do you a very nice Gin and French.

RAGLAN. I should like Gin and It, I think.

BRANDON. Gin and It ? Right. (*Goes over to sideboard, opens bottles and commences to pour carefully. Talks while doing this.*) Yes, we leave to-night about twelve, and travel by (*pouring deftly*) automobile—in the (*more*

pouring)—let us hope—moonlight. And of course all this place is simply covered (*pouring*) with books.

RAGLAN. Covered with books ?

BRANDON (*coming down with drink*). Yes. ·, I've come into a library.

RAGLAN. Come into a library ?

BRANDON (*going to sideboard to pour a drink for himself*). Of course, books aren't really in your line, are they, Kenneth ? (*He is opening a fresh bottle.*)

RAGLAN. No—not really. Only P. G. Wodehouse.

GRANILLO. Oh—are you good at P. G. Wodehouse ?

RAGLAN. Yes. Why ? Are you ?

GRANILLO. Yes—rather.

RAGLAN. Good Lord—I shouldn't have thought you would have been.

GRANILLO. Oh, rather. . . .

BRANDON (*pouring again*). Did you ever hear of old Gerry Wickham, Kenneth ? An uncle of mine.

RAGLAN. Oh, yes—rather.

BRANDON. Well, you know he's died just lately.

RAGLAN. Oh—has he ? Yes ?

BRANDON. Well, it's *his* library (*pouring*) which he has very kindly (*pouring*) and unexpectedly (*pouring*) bestowed upon me.

RAGLAN. Good Lord !

BRANDON. To the unspeakable mortification of Sir Johnstone Kentley.

RAGLAN. Oh, Sir Johnstone Kentley. He's quite a famous collector, isn't he ?

BRANDON. Yes. He's coming here to-night.

RAGLAN. Good heavens—is he ? It is the same man, isn't it ? He lives in Grosvenor Square and has a son.

BRANDON (*pause*). Quite right, Kenneth. He lives in Grosvenor Square (*pause*), and has a son.

[BRANDON *comes down with his own drink, lights a cigarette, and sits down.*

He also runs to a sister, and she's coming too.

RAGLAN. Oh—really ?

BRANDON. Yes. A reward of ten pounds is offered to any person or persons forcing, by dynamite or other means, more than two words out of her at the same time.

RAGLAN. Why—is she uncommunicative ?

BRANDON. “Is she uncommunicative ! . . .” Uncommunicative, Kenneth, is not the word.

RAGLAN. Really ? Tell me, Sir Johnstone's son. Isn't that Ronald Kentley, the lad who's so frightfully good at sports ?

BRANDON. That's right. You don't know him, do you ?

RAGLAN. No. I've never met him, but he wins hurdles, and hundreds of yards, and things like that, doesn't he ?

BRANDON. Yes. That's right. As a matter of fact, he's the living image of yourself. Isn't he, Granno ?

GRANILLO. Yes. He is like.

RAGLAN. Me ? In what way ?

BRANDON. Oh, in every way. Same age. Same height. Same colour. Same sweet and refreshing innocence.

RAGLAN. Oh, shut up. I'm not an athlete, anyway.

BRANDON. No. But you're just as much alive. In fact, more so.

RAGLAN (*awkwardly*). Am I ? Then you're having Sir Johnstone here just sort of to make him grind his teeth with envy about the books, then ?

BRANDON. On the contrary, I'm going to let him have exactly what he wants—provided I don't want it. But I'm telling you all this, Kenneth, just to excuse the terrible mess we're in. You'll observe that we're having our meal off a chest.

RAGLAN. Oh, yes. (*Looks at chest.*) I thought it looked rather weird.

BRANDON. Good Lord, Kenneth. You're getting positively fat.

RAGLAN. Am I ?

BRANDON. Nothing like the little boy who used to fag for me at school.

RAGLAN. Lord ! That's a long while ago.

BRANDON. Oh, it doesn't seem so very long.

RAGLAN. Of course, I used to think you an absolute hero in those days, Brandon.

BRANDON. Did you ? Well, as a matter of fact, I was always more or less popular amongst the juniors.

GRANILLO. It was I who was the unpopular one.

BRANDON. Were you unpopular, Granno ?

RAGLAN. Oh, yes, I remember I used to loathe you in those days.

GRANILLO. There you are.

BRANDON. Why did you loathe him ?

RAGLAN. Oh, I don't know. I suppose games were the only things that ever counted in those days. I'm sure it was most unreasonable.

GRANILLO. It was, I assure you. I'm very harmless.

[*Bell rings.*

BRANDON. Here we are. I wonder if that's Rupert. Did you ever meet Rupert, Kenneth ? Rupert Cadell ?

RAGLAN. No—I can't say I have.

BRANDON. No—he was before your time, wasn't he ? (*He rises, goes to the door, and opens it.*) Ah-ha, the ravishing Leila ! Come along, my dear, this way.

[*Enter LEILA ARDEN. She, like RAGLAN, is young, good-looking, and has no ideas. She also has the same tendency to conceal that deficiency with a show of sophistication. In this she is perhaps more successful than RAGLAN. She has a fairly good stock of many-syllabled and rather outré words which she brings out with a rather comic emphasis, rolling her eyes the while, as though she doesn't really mean what she is saying. In*

this way she never actually commits herself to any emotion or feeling, and might even be thought deep. But she is not.

BRANDON. How are you, Leila ? You know Granno, don't you ?

LEILA. Hullo. (*Shakes hands with GRANILLO.*)

BRANDON. And this is Kenneth. Mr. Raglan—Miss Arden.

LEILA. Hullo.

RAGLAN. Hullo.

[They shake hands, BRANDON indicates chair, LEILA sits down.]

BRANDON. Now what are you going to have, Leila ? Kenneth's having a Gin and It.

LEILA. I'd adore one.

[BRANDON goes to sideboard. There is a rather awkward silence.]

(To GRANILLO.) And how are you getting on ?

GRANILLO. Very well, thanks. And how are you ?

LEILA. Oh, I'm all right.

[She is between RAGLAN and GRANILLO, and turns and grins at RAGLAN, who is only too willing to grin at her.]

Of course, I simply KNOW—that I've seen you somewhere before.

RAGLAN (*looking foolish*). Really ?

LEILA. You're not a Frinton-on-Sea expert, are you ?

RAGLAN. No. I just go there occasionally, that's all.

LEILA. How weird ! Because I could simply SWEAR that I've seen you somewhere before.

RAGLAN (*grinning*). Oh—how weird !

BRANDON (*coming down with drink for LEILA*). Previous incarnation, I expect. Here you are, Leila. Excuse mess. We're in a horrible mess here

altogether. Kenneth'll tell you about it. I've come into a library.

LEILA. Come into a library, my dear ? My dear, how weird !

BRANDON. Yes. And I hope you don't think you're going to get anything to eat, because all the servants are away and we're very humble.

LEILA. No—you told me that, and I had a simply GLUTTONOUS high tea. GORGED, my dear !

BRANDON. Oh, well, that's all right. I really wouldn't have asked you—only this is the last chance of seeing you before we go.

LEILA. Are you going up to-night, then ?

BRANDON. Yes.

RAGLAN. Of course, I'm feeling absolutely ghastly—coming dressed like this.

LEILA. Why ? I'm sure I ought to be dressed too. (*Tuflning to BRANDON.*) Of course you must admit, my dear, this is a most mysterious and weird meal.

GRANILLO (*a little too heavily*). Why mysterious and weird ?

LEILA (*sensing his heaviness, which causes a faintly embarrassed little pause*). Oh—I don't know. Just mysterious. And weird. (*Pause. To RAGLAN.*) Don't you think it's mysterious and weird ? Such a queer time, to begin with.

[*Bell rings.*

BRANDON (*cutting in rather loudly*). Here we are. I'll bet you that's old Kentley. Forgive me a moment. I must go and usher him in.

[*Goes out, leaving door open. Voices from below.*

LEILA (*softly, rolling her eyes*). Who's the newcomer ?

GRANILLO (*rising and putting his cigarette out on table*). The new-comer, Leila, is the revered Sir Johnstone Kentley, who has come here to look at books.

LEILA. My dear !

GRANILLO. Unless it's Rupert—which it may be, of course.

[Goes to door as BRANDON, SIR JOHNSTONE KENTLEY, and MRS. DEBENHAM enter.]

SIR JOHNSTONE *is a decidedly pleasant old gentleman, slightly bent, old for his years, with clear grey eyes—slow-moving, utterly harmless, gentle and a little listless. His listlessness and gentleness, however, derive not alone from a natural kindliness, but also from the fact that he has been in a position of total authority throughout the greater part of his life, and has had no need to assert himself. But he has only too plainly never abused that authority, and the whole effect of him is completely captivating.*

MRS. DEBENHAM *is the sister of SIR JOHNSTONE. She is tallish, plainly dressed, has been widowed long, is very plain, about fifty. She hardly ever opens her mouth, her sole means of expression being a sudden, broad, affable smirk. This she switches on, in a terrifying way, every now and again, but immediately relapses into the lost, miserable, absent-minded gloom which characterises her. She is, indeed, so completely a nonentity as to acquire considerable personality and distinction from the very fact.*

SIR JOHNSTONE (*talking as he enters*). . . . which, of course, can never be done. Ah, how do you do, Granillo ? How are you getting on ?

[*They shake hands.*

You know my sister, don't you ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. Yes ! (*Smirks.*)

[*They shake hands. [RAGLAN is standing sheepishly and LEILA does not quite know what to do with herself.*

BRANDON (*taking stage*). Now let me introduce you all . . . This, Mrs. Debenham, is Miss Leila Arden. . . . Miss Arden—Sir Johnstone Kentley.

LEILA. Howdyoudo.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Howdyoudo.

BRANDON. And this is Mr. Kenneth Raglan.

RAGLAN. Howdyoudo, sir.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Howdyoudo.

[MRS. DEBENHAM *smirks*.

[*Embarrassed pause, SABOT has come in after KENTLEY, etc., and is quietly going on with the laying of the chest.*

BRANDON. And there we are. And here, Sir Johnstone, is an armchair which I think is more or less in your line. (*Leads him down to it.*) And here is a chest, from which we're going to feed, the table having been commandeered for books.

SIR JOHNSTONE (*peering at chest*). That's not a Cassone, is it ?

BRANDON. No, sir. It's not genuine, it's a reproduction. But it's rather a nice piece. I got it in Italy.

[GRANILLO *has seen that all are seated, and is now standing at mantelpiece, SABOT is moving about, laying plates, knives, sandwiches, etc., on chest.*

(*To SIR JOHNSTONE*) Now will you have a cocktail, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Good heavens, no, my boy. (*He looks vaguely about the room.*)

BRANDON. And you, Mrs. Debenham ? (*She merely smirks.*)

You *won't* ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. Oh, yes, please.

BRANDON. Ah. Good. Now what will you have ? Will you have a Gin and Angostura, or a Gin and French, or a Gin and Italian ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. Yes, please.

SIR JOHNSTONE. These books I'm going to see—where are they, Brandon ?

BRANDON (*going to sideboard again*). Oh, the books. They're in the other room. The dining-room. I laid them out as well as I could, and there's more

space in there.

SIR JOHNSTONE. I shall be interested to see them—most interested. . . . I seem to remember that Wickham had a really remarkable little lot of Shakesperana . . .

BRANDON. Yes. But I'm afraid the folios were sold before he died. But there's a run of the quartos, and a really amazing lot of Baconian stuff. At least, I'm told it's very fine.

[Bell rings. SABOT quickly leaves room.]

SIR JOHNSTONE. Ah-ha. Bacon, my boy. That's a special favourite of mine.

LEILA. Of course, all this is TOO technical and peculiar!

RAGLAN. Yes—isn't it ?

BRANDON. I expect Mrs. Debenham has learnt to put up with this sort of thing, hasn't she ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. *(Pause. She wakes up, and suddenly realises she is being addressed.)* Oh, yes !

LEILA. Of course, I'm too Philistine for words. Do go on. What about Bacon ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. I think we'd better try and restrain ourselves, my boy.

LEILA. Oh no. Do go on. You must tell us about Bacon. Isn't he the person who dashes round *being* Shakespeare, or something like that ?

[Enter RUPERT CADELL in doorway. He is of medium height and about twenty-nine. He is a little foppish in dress and appearance, and this impression is increased by the very exquisite walking-stick which he carries indoors as well as out. He is lame in the right leg. He is enormously affected in speech and carriage. He brings his words out not only as though he is infinitely weary of all things, but also as though articulation is causing him some definite physical pain which he is trying to circumvent by keeping his head and body perfectly still. His sentences are often involved, but nearly

always syntactically complete. His affectation almost verges on effeminacy, and can be very irritating, but he has a very disarming habit, every now and again, of retrieving the whole thing with an extraordinarily frank, open and genial smile.

BRANDON. Ah, here he is, here he is ! The last, as usual. Come along in, Rupert.

[RUPERT *comes down a little.*

(*Introducing*) Mr. Cadell—Mrs. Debenham.

[MRS. DEBENHAM *smirks.*

RUPERT. Howdyoudo.

BRANDON. Miss Leila Arden.

RUPERT. Howdyoudo.

LEILA. Howdyoudo.

BRANDON. Mr. Cadell—Sir Johnstone Kentley.

RUPERT (*a little more solemnly*). Howdyoudo, sir. (*There is no smile on his face.*)

SIR JOHNSTONE. Howdyoudo.

BRANDON. Mr. Raglan—Mr. Cadell.

RAGLAN. Howdyoudo.

[RUPERT *bows.*

RUPERT. But tell me. I don't quite follow. Have I come dressed, or have others come undressed ? I telephoned an inquiry, but could not obtain—er—any answer.

BRANDON. Now contain yourself, Rupert, and sit down. (*Indicates chair.*)

[RUPERT *looks at chair, and then espies chest. Stops affectedly, bends down to look at it, and prods it with stick. Pauses.*

RUPERT. What in heaven ? . . .

BRANDON. There you are, Rupert, we're going to have our meal off a chest.

RUPERT. Oh—are we ?

BRANDON. Yes.

RUPERT (*still prodding*). Why are we going to have our meal off a chest ?

BRANDON. Because it's a very nice chest, and because all the tables are covered with books.

LEILA. Yes. Haven't you heard ? The entire place is covered with library.

RUPERT. Oh ! (*Looks round, limps to chair, and sits down.*)

BRANDON. Now, Rupert, are you going to have a cocktail ?

RUPERT. No. Thank you. I have had four already.

RAGLAN *and* LEILA. Four !

RUPERT. Yes. Why ? Aren't I carrying my drink ?

LEILA. Oh yes—you're carrying it all right. It's just rather a mean advantage, that's all.

BRANDON (*to SABOT*). That's all right, Sabot. I'll ring when we're through. Then you can clear and get away.

SABOT. Thank you, sair.

[*Exits.*

RUPERT. When do we begin to have our meal off a chest ? Because I'm personally rather peckish.

BRANDON. We're starting right away, Rupert. (*Coming down to chest.*) Now look here, you people, there are a lot of plates and knives and things here—and lots of sandwiches and things—paté, caviare, and salmon and cucumber, and what-not. . . . All you've got to do is to rally round and gather what you want. . . .

[*They all rise and gather garrulously around chest, offering each other different dishes, etc. Eventually, and still talking, they resume their places.*

SIR JOHNSTONE (*to RUPERT*). Are you the great Cadell, then ?

RUPERT. The great Cadell, sir ?

[LEILA, *having her first gulp at her champagne, gives a long, satisfied sigh, "Ahhhhhhhh!"* RUPERT *stops to look at her, in his own fashion, and then looks at SIR JOHNSTONE again.*

Why, do you know anything about me ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh—I've read your poems—that's all. Or at least a lot of them.

RUPERT. Dear me. I hope you're not confusing me with the other Cadell, sir.

SIR JOHNSTONE. No. I don't think so. You write poems, don't you ?

RUPERT. I am told so, sir. But then so does the other Cadell. A devastating creature who spells it with two d's.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh no. There's no confusion.

GRANILLO. I never knew you could spell Cadell with two d's.

LEILA. Same here.

RAGLAN. Yes, same here. I knew a Cadell once, and she used to spell it with only one d. Louisa Cadell. Horrible old hag she was, too. She lived in Bayswater.

RUPERT. Dear Heaven. The young man is alluding to my aunt.

RAGLAN. Oh, I say. I'm terribly sorry. Have I dropped a brick ?

RUPERT. No. You have said a mouthful. (*Getting up.*) Can I have another sandwich ? (*He takes another sandwich, sits down, all at once spills some wine, and commences violently wiping trousers with handkerchief.*) I say, must we have our meal off a chest ?

BRANDON. Here you are. (*Comes forward, gets him another glass of wine and generally puts him right.*)

RUPERT. Thank you.

[BRANDON *goes over and fills* SIR JOHNSTONE'S *glass with wine.*

BRANDON. Is Lady Kentley any better, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. No. I'm afraid not. I'm afraid she's still in bed.

BRANDON. Oh. I'm sorry. And how's Ronald getting on ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh, Ronald ? He's getting on all right. He's merely idling, of course, now, like you two.

GRANILLO. Does he like it, or does he want to get back ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh no. He doesn't want to get back. He has a great time.

LEILA. Who's Ronald ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Ronald ? He's my son and heir. Twenty years of age.

RUPERT. Oh, I know Ronald. He was in the papers the other day for winning the high jump at the Varsity sports.

SIR JOHNSTONE. That's right.

RUPERT. Yes. I remember it well. There was a picture of me next door to it.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh—was there ?

RUPERT. Yes. Not—though—for winning the high jump. Oh yes, quite an old friend.

BRANDON. Yes, he's a sprightly lad, is Ronald.

[There is a slight pause.]

RAGLAN. Brandon says he's like me. Is that true, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Why, yes, he is rather like you, when you come to think of it. Quite like, really.

RAGLAN (to LEILA). I've a double apparently.

LEILA. My dear ! How EXCRUCIATING !

RAGLAN (to SIR JOHNSTONE). In what way is he like me, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh, I don't know. Just in general youthfulness. . . .

BRANDON. And innocence, and freshness, and. . . .

RAGLAN. Oh, shut up, Brandon.

BRANDON. He's so afraid they won't think him a man, isn't he ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. That's like Ronald, too. I'm afraid they won't feel like that for long, though.

BRANDON. No. They won't, poor dears.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Of course, my boy is the most infantile thing in the world. I honestly believe his only passion in holiday time is the movies. When I saw him at lunch he was just *rushing* off to the Coliseum.

[GRANILLO makes movement at mantelpiece.]

BRANDON. But that's not the movies, is it ? I thought it was a music-hall.
Not that I know. I've never been there in my life.

LEILA. Never been to the Coliseum ?

RUPERT. Why—*should* he have been to the Coliseum ?

LEILA. Oh—I thought everybody had been.

BRANDON. Well—I haven't.

GRANILLO. Neither have I. Is that the place in the Haymarket ?

LEILA. My dear ! You're mixing it up with the Capitol ! What abysmal ignorance !

[GRANILLO *is standing with his back to the mantelpiece, his coat open and the blue ticket protuberant in his pocket.*

SIR JOHNSTONE. You'd have been a sad dog as an ancient Roman, Granillo.

RUPERT. Yes. He would. Indeed in the days of the Cæsars, the results of confusing the Coliseum with the Capitol would have been, I should imagine, almost fatal. Certainly you'd have been taken up.

LEILA. What *was* the Capitol, then ? Wasn't it where they all got up and held forth ?

RUPERT. The Capitol, I am told, was the Roman temple to Jupiter on the Tarpeian hill.

LEILA. Oh, my dear !—weren't they SWEET !

RUPERT. Wherein—exactly—were the Ancient Romans “*sweet*” ?

LEILA. My dear—such awful FOOLS ! Going in for Jupiter, and temples, and all that. Such a terrible lot of bother about *nothing* !

SIR JOHNSTONE. Well, that's one way of looking at it.

LEILA. Well, anyway, you must——

RUPERT (*interrupting*). But to return to the twentieth century for just one moment. . . . Do you mean to tell me, Granillo, that you have never been to the Coliseum ?

GRANILLO. No. Of course I haven't. Never. Why?

RUPERT (*looking at him*). Is that so ? Dear, dear. . . .

GRANILLO. Yes. Why ?

RUPERT (*slowly. Everybody quite still.*) You mean to say you can stand there—and puff out your chest—and tell me you have never been to the Coliseum ?

GRANILLO. Yes. Why ? Why should you think that I had ?

RUPERT. Merely the hawk-like sharpness of my vision.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Why ? Is it a crime never to have been to the Coliseum ?

RUPERT. No, sir, I don't expect it's a crime.

SIR JOHNSTONE. For in that case I am afraid I myself am guilty.

RUPERT. Oh no, sir. I merely thought that Granillo—by the mere look of him, standing there in his beautiful dark blue suit—was not the sort of person who had never been to the Coliseum.

GRANILLO. Well—I haven't.

BRANDON (*coming down from sideboard*). But young Ronald has been to the Coliseum, anyway, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. That's right.

[*There is a slight pause, LEILA gets up for another sandwich, and RAGLAN comes forward to help her.*

RUPERT (*coming forward and getting in further muddles with plates, etc.*). You know, I'm coming to the conclusion that there's some ulterior motive about this chest picnic.

GRANILLO (*again a trifle too heavily*). What do you mean ? Ulterior motive ?

[RUPERT *looks at him without replying. He is obviously a little surprised at the other's tone.*

BRANDON. You mean it's done purely to make poor Rupert spill things over his trousers ?

RUPERT. I think it's more than likely.

LEILA. Oh, I suspect much worse than that. *I think they've committed murder, and it's simply chock-full of rotting bones. It's just the sort of thing*

for rotting bones, isn't it ?

RAGLAN. Yes—it is, isn't it ?

LEILA. Yes, it is.

BRANDON. My dear—you're right. I wouldn't let you see the inside of that chest for worlds.

LEILA. I'm sure you wouldn't.

[GRANILLO, *again noticeably, walks back to his seat, R.*

And it's all very well to try and bluff me out and pretend you're willing to let me see——

BRANDON. But, my dear—that's just what I said *I wouldn't* do.

LEILA. I have my suspicions.

SIR JOHNSTONE. But surely your murderer, having chopped up and concealed his victim in a chest—wouldn't ask all his friends round to come and eat off it.

RUPERT (*slowly*). Not unless he was a very stupid, and very conceited murderer.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Very stupid, and very conceited.

RUPERT. Which, of course, he might be.

LEILA. In fact, it's exactly what all criminals are !

BRANDON. Oh no, I don't think so. . . .

[*There is another pause.*

LEILA. Talking of murderers—have you seen that new thing on at the New Gallery ?

RAGLAN. Yes, I saw that. Isn't it good ?

LEILA. Yes. *Isn't* it good ? I didn't like *her*, though, much—that new woman—I didn't think she was much good.

RAGLAN. No, *she* wasn't much good. That other film was good, though, wasn't it ?

LEILA. Yes. *Wasn't* it good ?

RAGLAN. Yes, it was good, wasn't it ?

RUPERT. The Lord look down upon us. We have fallen amongst fans.

LEILA. Of course, the man I've got a passion for is William Powell.

RUPERT. Is *he* good ?

LEILA. My dear, ABSOLUTELY MARVELLOUS ! You know, my dear—STRONG SILENT. In fact, I think I like him better than John Gilbert now.

RUPERT. John Gilbert who ?

RAGLAN. Oh, do you like John Gilbert ?

LEILA. Oh—rather. I think he's terribly good.

RAGLAN. Yes—he is good. Not as good as Ronald Colman, though.

[RUPERT *is looking sardonically at each speaker in turn.*

LEILA. Oh—don't you think so ? Did you see him in the old version of "The Merry Widow" ?

RAGLAN. Yes, he was good in that. Of course, he had a moustache in that, didn't he ?

RUPERT. I expect *that* improved him, didn't it ?

LEILA. But then John Gilbert *always* had a moustache, didn't he ?

RAGLAN. Oh no. Rather not. I've seen him in thousands of ones without. All the early ones.

RUPERT (*despairingly*). The early ones !

LEILA. By the way, did you see Robert Montgomery in that thing with Joan Crawford ? I've forgotten what it was called—the Wonderful Something—or something—you know—it was all sort of—you know. . . .

RUPERT. I, for one, at the moment of speaking, do not.

RAGLAN. Yes, I know what you mean. The Wonderful—I've forgotten what—it was jolly good, wasn't it ? What do you think of her—Joan Crawford ?

LEILA (*disparagingly*). Oh—I don't know. . . . Like all *these*, you know.

RAGLAN. Oh—I think she's rather good.

RUPERT. I once went to the pictures and saw Mary Pickford.

RAGLAN. Oh—how did you like her ?

RUPERT. Oh, I don't know. Like all *these*, you know. . . .

LEILA. What was she in, anyway ?

RUPERT. I can't quite recall. The Something Something, I think. Or something like that. *(Pause.)* Something very like it, anyway.

LEILA. I don't believe you ever went.

BRANDON. I never knew you were a fan like this, Leila. I simply abhor the things myself.

LEILA. What—on moral grounds ?

BRANDON. Oh, no. They simply make me go to sleep. And all those places are so infernally stuffy. Tell me, what do *you* think about films, Mrs. Debenham ?

[Pause.]

MRS. DEBENHAM *(waking up and smirking)*. No—I don't. . . .

[Silence. Everybody looking at each other and inclined to giggle.]

LEILA. Well, if you'd seen——

RUPERT *(cutting in)*. Pardon me. I cannot quite ascertain Mrs. Debenham's opinion. She says she doesn't. Does she mean that she does not think about films, or merely that she does not think at all ? *[Pause.]*

MRS. DEBENHAM. Oh yes. Decidedly.

RUPERT. Ah. I see.

BRANDON *(rising and placing his plate upon chest with an air of finality)*. Well, anyway, who says Books ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Aye. *(Rising.)*

LEILA. Yes, that's a very good idea.

BRANDON *(looking at LEILA)*. I have a gramophone for the very young, if they care to make use of it.

LEILA. But I thought you said the room was covered with books.

BRANDON. Oh no—there's room to dance.

RAGLAN *(looking at wireless cabinet)*. Hullo, you've got a wireless, I see.

BRANDON. Yes. So we have. *(Goes over to wireless.)* Let's see what they're doing. They won't be dancing yet. *(He touches the apparatus.)*

LEILA. Oh no. Not till eleven.

[Pause.]

BRANDON. Hullo—it's not doing anything.

RUPERT. Then take it off. (*He rises, goes down to fire, takes a cigarette and lights it.*)

BRANDON (*taking SIR JOHNSTONE by the arm and leading him off*). This way, Sir Johnstone. (*He frees his arm at the doorway, and turns to MRS. DEBENHAM.*) Will you come along, too, Mrs. Debenham ? You dance, don't you ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. Oh, I really couldn't say !

RUPERT. We never know until we try, do we ?

MRS. DEBENHAM. I beg your pardon.

RUPERT. Granted—utterly.

BRANDON. Well, come along, the rest of you—if you want to, that is. I've dozens of records in here.

[*They go out, RAGLAN rather ostentatiously holding back the door for LEILA, who smiles up at him and says "Thank you."*

GRANILLO and RUPERT are left alone, GRANILLO comes over to him at mantelpiece and takes another cigarette.

GRANILLO (*slapping him affectionately upon shoulder*). Well, Rupert ?

RUPERT. Well ? You look rather fagged out.

GRANILLO. Do I ? I don't feel it.

RUPERT. What have you been doing with yourself?

GRANILLO (*yet again too heavily*). Doing with myself ? Nothing. Why do you ask ?

RUPERT. For no reason whatever, my dear Granno. You seem rather touchy.

GRANILLO. Yes. I'm a bit liverish. I've been sleeping most of the afternoon, and that always puts me out for the rest of the day.

RUPERT. Ah, that's what *I* do. . . .

[*In the room across the passage the gramophone begins.*

GRANILLO. Writing anything lately ?

RUPERT (*reflectively*). Yes. . . . A little thing about Doves . . . and a little thing about Rain. . . . Both good. Very good, in fact. . . . And then, of course, I'm getting ahead with the big work. . . .

GRANILLO. That going well ?

RUPERT. Yes. Very. Indeed, it promises to be not only the best thing I have ever written, but the best thing I have ever read. (*Nodding his head to gramophone.*) This is rather nice, isn't it ?.. .

[GRANILLO *suddenly yawns, sticking out his chest and lifting his hands. He is above Rupert, who is leaning against mantelpiece. The blue Coliseum slip is prominent in his waistcoat. He resumes normal position, leaning against mantelpiece, RUPERT now also leans against, mantelpiece, close to him, and looking at him.*

RUPERT. So you and Brandon leave to-night for Oxford ?

GRANILLO (*looking into fire*). That's right.

RUPERT. What time are you going ?

GRANILLO. We're aiming to start about 10.30.

RUPERT. Arriving there about when ?

GRANILLO. Oh. About three. Why ?

RUPERT. Peculiar form of enjoyment, Granno. But, then, that's like you.

GRANILLO. Why ? Lovely moonlight night.

RUPERT. It's not. It's raining already.

GRANILLO. It's not.

RUPERT. Yes, it is. Listen.

[*The rain can be heard pouring gently down. The gramophone has stopped in the next room, and there is a sudden great quiet over everything, RUPERT has put up his hand when telling GRANILLO to listen. GRANILLO listens, first by putting his head slightly sideways, and then by suddenly turning his head to look at the window. In this instant, RUPERT makes a deft snatch at the little ticket in GRANILLO'S waistcoat pocket. GRANILLO*

turns his head back in time to see RUPERT holding his hand behind his back rather awkwardly. But RUPERT puts his hand in his pocket in quite an easy fashion, and GRANILLO passes it over. But there has been a queer little pause.

GRANILLO (*looking into fireplace again*). Yes, it is coming down, isn't it ?

RUPERT (*spotting book on mantelpiece and reaching for it*). What have we here ? . . . Ah-ha ! . . . Conrad. Dear me. . . . Dear me. . . . (*Turns pages interestedly.*)

[The gramophone has started again. Suddenly the door across the passage opens and the sound of it comes loudly through. Also laughter and voices. Then the voice BRANDON.

BRANDON (*off*). Granno !

GRANILLO. Hullo ?

BRANDON. GRANNO ! You're WANTED !

GRANILLO. Coming ! (*To RUPERT*) Coming along ?

RUPERT. No, I'm all right.

[GRANILLO *exits*.

RUPERT, *left alone, goes on reading book for a little. Then, still standing and holding book, he fishes in his left-hand pocket for spectacle case. Is taking spectacles out and looking at book at the same time. Then he strolls towards armchair. He sits down, adjusts spectacles on face, still reading; puts case absently on table, and fishes in other pocket for blue ticket. He holds this out, straightening it on his knee as he goes on reading. Then he closes book with one hand, places it on table, leans back and gives his whole attention to ticket. Turns it over each side. Then he screws it up in his hand, which he drops over side of armchair, and looks thoughtfully—not suspiciously—ahead of him. The noise of the gramophone comes through from the other room. He stays like this for*

nearly half a minute. Then he takes up book again and is just about to read when SABOT enters.

RUPERT (*looking up*). Ah—good evening, Sabot.

SABOT (*commencing to clear meal away*). Good evening, sair.

RUPERT (*reading*). How are you getting on ?

SABOT. Very well, thank you, sair.

[SABOT *continues with his clearing. Rain is heard a little louder.*

RUPERT (*after a pause. Quietly.*) It's going to be a dirty night.

SABOT. Yes, sair. It's set in now, sair.

RUPERT. I suppose Mr. Brandon'll still be going, though.

SABOT. Pardon, sair ?

RUPERT. I suppose Mr. Brandon'll still be going though—to Oxford ?

SABOT. Oh—yes, sair. I suppose so, sair.

[SABOT *busies himself with clearing, RUPERT all at once puts down book and looks at little ticket again.*

RUPERT. Have you any idea of the date, Sabot ?

SABOT. Ze date, sair ? Yes, sair. It ees zee—er (*screwing up eyes, just as he is about to remove a large bundle of plates*)—er—sixteenth, sair.

RUPERT. The ? (*He is about to repeat "the sixteenth" in surprise.*)

SABOT (*quickly*). No, sair ! No, sair ! It ees not, sair ! It ees the *seventeenth*, sair !

RUPERT (*looking quite openly at ticket*). Yes. I thought so. The *seventeenth*.

[*Pause.*

RUPERT. Have you been getting into trouble lately, Sabot ?

SABOT. Trouble, sair ?

RUPERT. Yes. Trouble.

SABOT. Er—*trouble*, sair ?

RUPERT. Uncanny as it may seem, the word I employed, Sabot, was trouble.

SABOT. Er—what kind of trouble, sair ?

RUPERT. Why—have you a selection ?

SABOT. Ah, sair. Life. She is full of trouble.

RUPERT. She certainly is. Indeed she is almost unintermittently troublesome. I was wondering, though, whether you had been getting into any trouble with your employers.

SABOT. Me, sair ? No, sair. What should make you think so, sair ?

RUPERT. Well, I telephoned this house at a quarter to eight and heard the most hysterical noises.

SABOT. Hysterical noises, sair ?

RUPERT. Hysterical—Sabot—noises. Somebody had evidently lost their nerve. I was wondering whether you were the cause of it.

SABOT. Me, sair ? No, sair. Not me, sair. I was not here till five to nine.

[Long pause, SABOT still clearing.]

RUPERT. Then are *you* the one that frequents the Coliseum, Sabot ?

SABOT (*not having heard, or understood, and merely being polite*). Yes, sair.

RUPERT (*seeing that this is the wrong reply, and looking up*). I said, are *you* the one that frequents the Coliseum ?

SABOT (*pulling himself together*). Oh, sair ! I did not hear, sair ! Pardon, sair. The Coliseum, sair ? No, sair.

RUPERT. You don't ?

SABOT. Zee—er—zee music-hall, sair ?

RUPERT. Yes.

SABOT (*in a puzzled fashion, as though accused, and quite innocently*). No, sair. . . . No, sair. I have been there once, sair. . . . Many years ago, sair.

RUPERT. But not lately ?

SABOT. NO, sair.

[Another pause, as SABOT goes on clearing.]

RUPERT. Then is it Mr. Granillo who frequents the Coliseum ?

SABOT. Mr. Granillo, sair ?

RUPERT. Or is it Mr. Brandon who frequents the place ?

SABOT. Mr. Brandon, sair ?

[On this the door opens and BRANDON walks in. He is quite bright and cheerful, and goes straight over to sideboard, plainly to fetch drinks. As he goes over, he speaks rallyingly.]

BRANDON. Hullo ! Hullo ! “Mr. Brandon” ? What’s all this about Mr. Brandon ?

RUPERT (*quickly*). I was asking the good Sabot, Brandon, whether Mr. Brandon would still travel to Oxford in all this rain. Wasn’t I, Sabot ?

SABOT (*looking up quickly from one to another, in a puzzled way*). Er . . . Yes, sair. Yes, sair.

BRANDON (*bending down to fish in cupboard in sideboard for bottles*). Well—I hope he told you that we are. What’s a little rain, anyway ? (*Has produced whisky bottle and is looking at it. Walks across room to door.*) Besides, we’ve got nobody to look after us here. One moment, I’ll be back in a minute. (*Suddenly turns down stage to look over RUPERT’S shoulder to see what he is reading.*) What’s he reading ? “The Rover.” I’ll be back in a minute. Why don’t you come in ? (*Turning to SABOT.*) That’s all right, Sabot. You can go straight away now—now that’s cleared.

SABOT. Thank you, sair.

BRANDON (*to RUPERT*). Back in a minute.

[He goes out. There is another pause as SABOT puts the final touch to his clearing.]

RUPERT. That, Sabot, was what we call a White One.

SABOT (*again uncomprehending*). A White One, sair ? (*Seeing.*) Oh, sair ! Yes, sair. . . . A white one, sair. (*Draws air in through his teeth rather nervously.*)

[RUPERT goes on reading, SABOT goes to door and opens it, comes back and fetches tray containing everything cleared, and goes out with it into the passage, leaving door open. He can be heard putting down tray outside, comes back to close door, but pauses in doorway. He bows.

Bon soir, monsieur.

RUPERT (looking up from book). Good night, Sabot.

[SABOT goes out. There is a pause. The rain comes down, RUPERT abruptly closes book and gets up. Moves towards the window. He pauses at chest and gives it a kick—not very suspiciously, but curiously, in passing—goes on to window and looks out. Rain. He comes down and helps himself to a drink. Goes back to the same chair and resumes book. Suddenly closes it and looks in front of him. After about ten seconds he is about to resume book, when a chorus of voices is heard from the next room and BRANDON re-enters.

BRANDON (looking at chest and at RUPERT). Hullo, Sabot gone ?

RUPERT. Yes, Sabot gone. (Puts book on table.) Brandon.

[BRANDON closes door and comes down to mantelpiece for a cigarette. Lights it. Pause, RUPERT settles himself in armchair.

BRANDON. Um ? (Begins to poke the fire.)

RUPERT. I have just thought of something rather queer.

BRANDON (still at fire). Something queer. What's that ?

RUPERT. All this talk about rotting bones in chests. . . .

[BRANDON stands up, poker in hand, and looks at RUPERT, who is gazing lethargically into the distance. The gramophone is suddenly heard again, together with a great guffaw of general laughter.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

The scene is the same as before, and no time has elapsed.

BRANDON (*in same attitude*). Talk about rotting bones in chests, Rupert ?

RUPERT. Yes.

BRANDON. What about them ? (*Turns round and begins poking fire again.*)

RUPERT. Do you remember when you were an infant, Brandon ?

BRANDON. M'm . . . (*Finishes poking fire, puts poker back and commences to wipe his hands on his handkerchief.*)

RUPERT. And how you used to tell me stories round the fire ?

BRANDON. Yes. Rather. I remember.

RUPERT. Do you remember your chest complex, Brandon ?

BRANDON. My chest complex ?

RUPERT. Yes. Whatever the story was—piratical, detective, murder, adventure or ghost—it always contained a marvellous *dénouement* with a bloody chest containing corpses. You had a perfect mania for it, don't you remember ?

BRANDON (*suddenly a trifle serious, forgetting himself*). Yes, I'd forgotten that.

RUPERT (*looking at him. Pause*). Why should you have remembered it ?

BRANDON (*putting handkerchief away and walking over to sideboard for whisky*). Yes, it's quite true. I remember now. What about it, though ?

RUPERT (*lightly*). Oh, nothing. Just queer, that's all. You were a morbid child.

BRANDON (*pouring out whisky. Quietly*). How queer—exactly ?

RUPERT. Oh, just queer. Us all talking to-night about rotting bones in chests. It just came back to me, that's all.

BRANDON (*intent upon pouring, and as though suddenly seeing light*). Oh ! I see what you mean ! Yes ! Are you going to have some of this, Rupert ?

RUPERT. What's that ? Whisky ? Yes. Thank you.

BRANDON. All right ! Don't get up. I'll bring it over. . . . (*Pours it out.*)
Say when. . . .

RUPERT. When. No. A little more. When. When !

[BRANDON *brings it over to him.*

Thank you.

BRANDON (*holding up his glass*). Happy days.

RUPERT. How's the old man getting on with his books ?

BRANDON. Going to take the entire library away with him, as far as I can see. I'm simply saying good-bye to it.

RUPERT. I didn't know you were a book collector.

BRANDON. I've only been one for about a year.

RUPERT. What exactly is your line ?

BRANDON. Well—I've theories about some of the Victorians. Everything comes round, you know, in time.

RUPERT. For example ? . . .

BRANDON. For example ? Well. . . Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, and people of that sort.

RUPERT. Matthew Arnold, perhaps.

BRANDON. What's wrong with Carlyle, anyway ?

RUPERT. My dear Brandon. An unspeakable person. Pull yourself together.

BRANDON. Oh, I don't agree with you. He's got guts, anyway.

RUPERT (*screwing up his face*). Guts !

BRANDON. And a kind of angry righteousness, which you don't get nowadays.

RUPERT. Thank God !

BRANDON (*swilling down remains of his whisky*). Well. I must go in and function. Aren't you coming ?

RUPERT (*getting up*). Yes.

[*Gramophone heard again.*

Ah—I like that one. (*Beating time.*) Dee de dee de dee dedeedee. (*At door.*) I say. What's the time ? (*Compares his watch with the grandfather clock.*) I want to be home fairly early to-night.

BRANDON. Plenty of time. Come along.

[*They go out together, BRANDON switching off light. The room is in darkness except for the light in the passage which gleams through the door.*

BRANDON (*off*). Now I've left the cigarettes. Go along in, Rupert. I'll be in in a moment.

[BRANDON *re-enters the room, his figure being silhouetted against the doorway as he comes in. There are voices from the next room as RUPERT enters it. BRANDON then comes down to the mantelpiece for cigarettes. Pause. He suddenly moves over to the window and draws the curtains back. He is silhouetted against the window's light. The rain is heard, and seen, beating against the windows. Then he comes down to chest, standing by it. He sits on it, and bends down to lock. The gramophone in the next room ceases. There is a pause. Suddenly the light in the passage goes off, and then on again. The figure on the chest becomes upright and tense. Pause. All at once GRANILLO'S figure is seen against the light of the doorway. He closes the door. He is inside the darkened room. The figure on the chest remains motionless, GRANILLO is moving towards the chest. Pause.*

[*There is a horrible, shuddering, muffled scream from GRANILLO. He has touched the other's body. At the same time BRANDON cries "Damnation!" GRANILLO'S scream dies down into a sobbing noise. There is a heavy thud as BRANDON, cursing*

furiously, rushes over to the little lamp on the table and switches it on.

BRANDON (*blazing*). What in God's name do you mean ?

[GRANILLO *has sunk down by the chest with his arms on it.*

GRANILLO. Oh—oh ! Oh, God !

BRANDON (*fiercely*). What's the matter, man ? Tell me what's the matter !

GRANILLO (*from arms*). I thought it was him. I thought it was him ! I thought it was Ronald !

[BRANDON *goes over and switches on light. Then he goes over to sideboard, and pours out large whisky, spilling some of it over. He brings it over to* GRANILLO.

BRANDON. For God's sake, drink that.

[GRANILLO *takes it and sips it feebly.*

Be quick—be quick, man !

GRANILLO. Why were you sitting there ? Why were you trying to frighten me ?

BRANDON. I wasn't trying to frighten you. I was wondering what you were up to. I wasn't even sure it was you. Why did you want to sneak in like that ? You got what you deserved. Hang you—you've upset me.

GRANILLO. I wanted to see that everything was all right. I'm sorry. My nerve's going. I'm all right. I'll be all right. (*Finishes the rest of the whisky with a gulp, and makes a wry face as it goes down.*) I'll be all right. Give me some more of that.

BRANDON (*taking glass*). Get up, get up ! (*Goes and pours him out some more.*)

[GRANILLO *gets up and sits on chest, BRANDON gives him another glass full of whisky-and-soda.*

BRANDON. I'm going into the other room. Come in when you can. (*Moving to door and pausing there.*) Don't get drunk on that.

GRANILLO. No.

[BRANDON goes out, closing door. Pause, GRANILLO looks in front of him. He swills off remainder of whisky at one gulp again. Pause, as he looks in front of him. Then goes to sideboard and helps himself to another large glass. Takes another sip, comes slowly down to fireplace, giving a little stagger of drunkenness just before reaching it. Leans against mantelpiece, looking into fire. Slowly turns round and looks at chest. Quickly takes another long gulp at whisky. Pulls a long face and commences to cough. Continues coughing horribly. Cannot leave off. Stops to gasp, and then starts again, BRANDON reenters hurriedly.]

BRANDON (*standing and looking at him*). What's the matter, man ?

GRANILLO (*straining*). Cough. (*Starts again.*)

BRANDON. Pull yourself together. Come on. Come on. You can stop if you want to. (*Thuds him on back.*) Come on. (*The coughing slowly dies out.*)

GRANILLO. All right. It went down the wrong way. (*He now seems quite calm again in every way.*) What are you back here for ? (*Sits down.*)

BRANDON. They want those Beethoven records. You know, those old ones. I couldn't find them in there. You had them last, didn't you ? Are they in here, or upstairs ?

GRANILLO. Oh yes. They're upstairs in my room.

BRANDON. I'll go and get them. Where are they ?

GRANILLO. They'll be a hell of a nuisance to get at. They're at the bottom of my trunk.

BRANDON. What ? The green one ?

GRANILLO. Yes. But they're right at the bottom, and it's locked. Must they have their Beethoven records ?

BRANDON. All right, then. You come and tell them. (*Comes down to fire and puts coal on it*) You're all right, aren't you ?

GRANILLO (*rising and going to door*). Yes. Quite.

BRANDON (*still poking fire, and stopping GRANILLO at door*). One moment, Granno.

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. Shut the door.

GRANILLO (*shutting it*). Yes.

BRANDON. You've got that little ticket, haven't you ? You'd better give it me and we'll destroy it right away now.

GRANILLO. What ticket ?

BRANDON. Ronald's ticket.

GRANILLO (*vaguely, only half realising the significance of what he has been asked*). What Ronald's ticket ?

BRANDON (*tersely, yet still quite coolly*). Oh, don't dither, Granno. Ronald's ticket, Ronald's Coliseum ticket.

GRANILLO. Ronald's Coliseum ticket ?

BRANDON. Sh ! Not so loud, you fool. Yes.

GRANILLO. I haven't got the Coliseum ticket.

BRANDON. Don't be a fool, Granno. I gave it to you.

GRANILLO. You didn't give it to me.

BRANDON (*clenching his hands and looking at the other*) Granno !

GRANILLO (*almost simultaneously*). Wait ! (*He plunges his thumb into the waistcoat pocket where the ticket was. Pause. Does the same with other thumb in opposite pocket. Pause. Then in the right waistcoat pocket beneath, then quickly to the left. Looks at BRANDON.*)

BRANDON. Granno !

[GRANILLO *goes through all four waistcoat pockets again rapidly and in a panic. Looks at BRANDON. Goes through two coat*

pockets, inside pockets, trousers pockets. Turns them out. Coat pockets again. Comes back to waistcoat pocket.

GRANILLO. You didn't——

BRANDON. Hip ! Hip !—hip pocket !

[GRANILLO feels in hip pocket, with the same result.

GRANILLO. You didn't——

BRANDON. Look again ! Look again !

[GRANILLO repeats entire performance, which lasts nearly a minute. This time, also, he brings out his wallet and looks in that.

GRANILLO (*hoarsely*). You didn't give it to me. I never had it.

BRANDON (*looking at him with a kind of calm rage*). I gave it into your hand.

GRANILLO. You didn't. I never had it

BRANDON. I gave it into your hand !

GRANILLO. See if you've got it.

BRANDON. I haven't got it, I tell you. Where is it ?

[Goes up towards sideboard. Commences rapidly and desperately searching himself with his back to audience. Commences banging on chest in sudden terrible rage.

Where is it ? Where is it ? Where is it ?

GRANILLO. Shshshsh ! I put it in my waistcoat pocket.

BRANDON (*shouting*). You put it in your waistcoat pocket ! You put it in your waistcoat pocket ! Where is it *now* ? Where is it *now* ?

[RUPERT has quietly entered, and is standing in doorway.

RUPERT. My dear Brandon. What have you lost ?

[There is a long pause as both glare into RUPERT'S eyes, and he looks coolly at them.

BRANDON (*his hands still on chest after the last blow*).

My temper, Rupert. Sorry, Granno.

GRANILLO (*very nervously and going over to give himself another drink*). That's all right.

RUPERT. Oh—— (*hobbling down C.*). I hope I'm not interfering.

BRANDON (*going down to fireplace and lighting cigarette*). No. It's my fault. You didn't know that Granno and I behaved like that, did you, Rupert ? But we often have outbursts, like this—and always about trifles, eh, Granno ?

GRANILLO. Yes. (*Drinking.*)

BRANDON. On this occasion it was a question of a case of Beethoven gramophone records, which poor old Granno couldn't produce. I was chiding him for his remissness. The party'll have to do without its Beethoven to-night.

RUPERT. Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. What a queer thing to quarrel about.

BRANDON. Yes. But we do quarrel about queer things nowadays, don't we, Granno ?

GRANILLO. We do.

RUPERT (*sitting down*). Can I have another drink, please ?

[GRANILLO *does not hear*.

BRANDON. Granno.

GRANILLO. Yes. Whisky ?

RUPERT. Yes, please.

[GRANILLO *pours it out for him and brings it over. His hand is trembling violently as he gives it to him, and this does not go by unobserved by* RUPERT.

RUPERT. Can I have some soda ?

GRANILLO. Oh. Sorry. (*Goes back and pours soda into glass. Returns with it to* RUPERT.)

RUPERT. Thank you. Ever so much. (*Drinks. Pause.*) Well, as a matter of fact, I'm in here on an errand.

BRANDON. An errand ?

RUPERT. Yes. I want some rope.

BRANDON *and* GRANILLO. Rope !

RUPERT. Yes. Why so excited ? Rope. The young people in the other room, having exhausted the lyric possibilities of the gramophone, are now projecting their entire youthful élan and ingenuity into the composition of a parcel. And they want something to do it up with.

BRANDON. A parcel ?

RUPERT. Yes. The old man's books. You'd better see what goes into it. I'm sure he's lifting all your best.

[There is a sudden tremendous clap of thunder.

RUPERT. Hullo—here we are. . . .

[There is another clap, which dies down into the distance.

I thought it was coming.

[There is an enormous downpour of rain, BRANDON goes to window.

BRANDON. Damnation. . . . Yes, it's coming down all right.

RUPERT. Surely——

[There is another, even more tremendous clap of thunder, which causes RUPERT to rise to his feet, GRANILLO, now again at sideboard, drops a full glass on to the floor.

GRANILLO. Blast ! *(Tries to mop it up with his handkerchief. Gets into difficulties.)* Oh, where are the servants ? Where are the servants ?

RUPERT *(going over to the window, after having looked at GRANILLO in a surprised way)*. My dear Brandon, surely you're not going in this ?

BRANDON *(also looking out of window)*. Oh yes, we'll go all right. It'll clear up soon.

[Another clap of thunder. Pause.

Besides, we've got nowhere to sleep here. The beds are all dismantled.

RUPERT *(coming down again)*. Oh, that needn't worry you. You can come round and put up with me if you care. I've plenty of room.

BRANDON (*coming down and putting his arm round RUPERT*). No—thank you, old boy. I think we'll try and make it.

RUPERT. Very well, have it your own way.

[RAGLAN *and* LEILA *burst in. RAGLAN is carrying books and is behind* LEILA.

LEILA. Hullo ! Did you hear that ?

RUPERT. M'm. We heard it all right. We're scared out of our wits.

LEILA. I *know* ! (*Going to window.*) And it's simply coming down in SHEETS ! Surely you're not going to Oxford to-night !

GRANILLO. Certainly we are.

LEILA. But, my dear, you CAN'T ! You'll be simply SWAMPED OUT, my dear ! FLOODED, my dear !

BRANDON. I hear you want some string, Leila.

LEILA. Oh, yes—so we do ! (*Turning to RAGLAN.*) Where are the books ? Oh, here we are. We're going to make a parcel, my dear. Come on. (*Takes half the books from RAGLAN and planks them down on the chest.*) We've got some paper. (*To RAGLAN again.*) Have you got the paper ?

RAGLAN. Oh, no, I've forgotten the paper.

LEILA. Well, go and get it ! Be quick !

RAGLAN. Right you are. [*Exits.*

BRANDON (*down at fire. Going to door and shouting*). And you might bring the cigarettes while you're there, Kenneth !

RAGLAN (*off*). Right you are !

[BRANDON *comes down to fire, RUPERT goes up to chest and begins looking at books.*

LEILA (*going to wireless*). Can I see what's on ?

BRANDON. Certainly.

[LEILA *touches indicators. For about ten seconds nothing happens.*

RUPERT. This, of course, is the time when I really enjoy the wireless.

LEILA. That's the storm, I expect.

[RAGLAN *returns with paper and cigarettes. Hands cigarettes to*
BRANDON.

RAGLAN. Here you are.

BRANDON. Ta.

RAGLAN (*giving paper to LEILA*). Here you are.

LEILA. Thanks. Well, now we want the string. Where's the string ?

BRANDON. Oh—the string's in the other room. I'll get it.

RAGLAN. No, no. I'll get it. Where is it ? (*Obviously enjoying himself and frantically eager to serve.*)

BRANDON. It's in that sort of big vase thing—you know.

LEILA. Do you know the sort of big vase thing ?

RAGLAN. Oh yes—I know. I'll get it. (*Rushes out again.*)

RUPERT (*looking up from book and straight at LEILA for a moment, mockingly.*) Isn't he sweet ?

LEILA. Yes, he is rather a lamb. (*Begins to spread paper out on chest.*)

RUPERT (*putting book down*). Yes. (*Hobbling over to chair, L.*) A decided duck. (*Sits down.*)

[RAGLAN *returns with ball of string.*

RAGLAN. Here we are. (*Standing over LEILA helpfully as she arranges books. Turns to BRANDON.*) Oh ! And Sir Johnstone wants to know whether he can browse on that sort of topshelf thing—I didn't quite follow what he

BRANDON. Oh yes. I know what he means. (*To GRANILLO, who, he notices, is about to have another drink.*) I say, Granno, do go in and explain to him. The poor old man's getting into hopeless muddles.

[GRANILLO *at sideboard. Takes and swallows drink swiftly. Then comes over and, walking unsteadily, happens to stumble against chest. He walks out a little insecurely in a slight pause and silence.*

LEILA (*rolling her eyes*). Just a *little*—I think ?

RUPERT. I should say completely.

BRANDON. What ? Granno blotto ? Yes. He is a bit. It's this whisky.

[There is another growl of thunder.]

RAGLAN. Hullo, listen. Here we are again.

LEILA (*looking behind her*). Oh, my hat !

BRANDON. I believe you're afraid of storms, Leila.

LEILA. My dear ! I am. I simply rush round in circles. It's hereditary, you know. You should see my mother.

RUPERT. What does she rush round in ?

LEILA. My dear ! She doesn't ! She simply hides herself in cupboards.

BRANDON. Really ?

LEILA (*taking the string from RAGLAN*). All entangled in the linen, my dear ! If it comes on again, you'll probably all see me suddenly take a *violent plunge* into this chest.

RAGLAN. I should love to see that.

LEILA. Head-foremost, my dear ! By the way, can you get into this chest, or is it locked ?

[She is busy with string, and the remark goes unanswered.]

BRANDON, *lighting cigarette, pretends not to hear. There is a pause.*

RUPERT (*repeating her words carefully and looking at BRANDON*). Can you get into this chest, Brandon, or is it locked ?

BRANDON (*pretending that he has not heard*). What ? Oh ! Yes, you can get into it if you want to.

LEILA. Oh, well, then *I'm* safe.

RUPERT (*looking at chest from chair*). Isn't there a lock on that, though ?

[Pause.]

BRANDON. Yes. There is.

LEILA (*suddenly and brightly*). Oh, my dear ! You've forgotten !
(*Handing the ball of string to RAGLAN.*) He's got his murdered man in here !

RAGLAN. Oh, so he has ! We'd forgotten that, hadn't we ?

LEILA. Well, *you* may have. *I* hadn't. I say, can I have another spot ?

BRANDON. I'm sorry, Leila. (*Goes over to sideboard.*) And you too, Kenneth ?

RAGLAN. Well—I think I would—really. . . .

LEILA (*tugging at string*). Yes, that's what he's been committing (*tug*)—Murder—(*tug*)—(*To RAGLAN*) Finger, please. No—here. That's right. And we've caught him (*tug*) red (*tug*) handed.

BRANDON (*from sideboard. Jokingly and easily*). Ah, Leila. You don't know how near the mark you are.

LEILA. Oh—don't I ? I know exactly what's inside this chest.

BRANDON. What ?

LEILA. There's an old, old man. You picked him up selling papers in the street, and you did him to death for the gold fillings in his teeth. You've a lust for gold, my dear.

BRANDON. Oh—I see you've been following me.

LEILA (*looking at lock and fumbling with it*). No. It *is* locked, *isn't* it ? And why a padlock ? What *have* you got in it ?

BRANDON. But you know, Leila. You have already explained to us what is in it.

LEILA. No. (*At parcel again.*) I honestly think you ought to let us have a look. Have you got the key ?

BRANDON. Yes. I've got the key. It's in my waistcoat pocket.

LEILA. Well—hand it over and let's have a look inside.

BRANDON. I'm hanged if I do.

LEILA. But why *not*, my dear ? If you're (*tug*) really (*tug*) innocent—you can prove it, dear.

BRANDON. But how often have I to tell you, Leila, that I am *not* innocent ? My hands are red with a crime committed less than three hours ago.

LEILA. Oh, well—if you won't (*tug—hurts her finger*)—damn—you won't. All the same, if I had strong men about me, they'd force it from you.

RAGLAN. I'll be your strong man.

LEILA. Will you ? All right. Go and be strong.

RAGLAN. How do I do that ?

LEILA. Oh—that's up to you.

RAGLAN (*coming down*). All right, then. (*Strikes attitude.*) Now then, Mr. Brandon, hand it over, or it will be the worse for you.

LEILA. Said he, eyeing the other fearlessly.

BRANDON. Come and get it, Kenneth.

RAGLAN (*a little nervously, and rather wishing he hadn't begun it*). Which pocket is it in ?

BRANDON. Top. Right.

RAGLAN. My right or yours ?

BRANDON. Mine.

LEILA. Go on. Seize it.

RAGLAN. I'll give him ten seconds, shall I ?

LEILA. That's right.

BRANDON. Right you are. Ten seconds.

LEILA. One. . . . Two. . . . Three. . . .

RAGLAN (*creeping a little nearer*). Won't you surrender ?

BRANDON. No.

LEILA. Four. . . . Five. . . . (*RAGLAN creeps a little nearer still.*) . . . Six. . . . Seven. . . .

[*Suddenly RAGLAN makes a spring at BRANDON, who is not ready for him.*]

LEILA. Hooray !

[*They begin to wrestle, both with a smile on their faces, but looking a little breathless and anxious. Also the thing becomes a little too protracted.*]

LEILA. My dears ! What will men not do for me !

[The struggle becomes a little more breathless, and even unfriendly, as RAGLAN looks for a moment as though he is going to get the best of it.]

LEILA. Slaughtering each other, of course !

[They continue. All at once, BRANDON seizes the other's wrist, has him at his mercy, and gives it a violent twist. BRANDON is looking, suddenly, entirely malicious.]

RAGLAN *(unexpectedly, and actually shouting)*. Ow !

[BRANDON still grips wrist.]

RUPERT *(who has been watching all carefully, now startled by the sheer noise)*. Mr. Raglan, we cannot on every occasion be Strong, but it is always possible to be Silent. What is he doing to you ?

RAGLAN *(released by BRANDON)*. I thought he'd bust my arm. I say, Brandon, you don't know your own strength, you know. *(Rubbing it.)* You gave it an absolutely foul tug.

BRANDON. Kenneth. I'm profoundly sorry. Really.

RAGLAN. No. That's all right. *(Moving to LEILA again.)* That's what you used to do to me at school. . . . *(To LEILA)* So I'm not your Strong Man after all.

LEILA. Never mind. You come back to the Mother Heart. I think he's a beast.

BRANDON. No, Leila. Only a desperate criminal, that's all. You must forgive me.

LEILA. All right. I'll forgive you. There was room in her heart even for the lowest of God's Creatures—a Criminal and an Outcast. . . .

RUPERT. How fearfully interested in crime we all seem to-night. Why poor Brandon can't be allowed to commit his own murders in quiet I don't know.

LEILA. Ah, but I'm a sleuth. I'm professionally interested, you see.

RAGLAN. Pearl White ?

LEILA. Yes. That's right. Pearl White. Besides, it's a simple question of bringing assassins to justice.

RUPERT. Oh—how would you do that ?

LEILA. Why—by having them arrested, of course.

RUPERT. Oh—would that do it ? I have heard of assassins being brought to the Old Bailey, but I have seldom heard of them being brought to justice. I hope you're not confusing the two.

LEILA. Well, what's wrong with the Old Bailey, anyway ?

RUPERT. My dear Leila, its blemish is single but ineradicable. It is human. Justice is not. BRANDON. Hear, hear !

RAGLAN. Oh, I say—are you one of these people who don't approve of capital punishment ?

RUPERT. I think, possibly, I approve of murder too much to approve of capital punishment.

LEILA *and* RAGLAN. Approve of murder !

[BRANDON *looks at* RUPERT *sharply*.

RUPERT. My dear Leila, there are so many people that I would so willingly murder—*particularly* the members of my own family—and *including* the aunt so felicitously described by Mr. Raglan as living in Bayswater—that it would be positively disingenuous to say that I don't approve of murder. Furthermore, I have already committed murder myself.

BRANDON. How do you get that ?

RUPERT. It is all simply a question of scale. You, my friends, have, paradoxically, a horror of murder on a small scale, a veneration for it on a large. That is the difference between what we call murder and war. One gentleman murders another in a back alleyway in London for, let us say, since you have suggested it, the gold fillings in his teeth, and all society shrieks out for revenge upon the miscreant. They call that murder. But when the entire youth and manhood of a whole nation rises up to slaughter the entire youth and manhood of another, not even for the gold fillings in each other's teeth, then society condones and applauds the outrage, and calls it war. How, then, can I say that I disapprove of murder, seeing that I have; in

the last Great War, acted on these assumptions myself ? A lamentable thing, certainly, and responsible for the fact that to-night, instead of being able to fool around the gramophone with you two—a thing I should very much like to have done—I have to hobble about like an old man, on one leg. But the point is that I have proved that I don't disapprove of murder. Haven't I ?

LEILA. No. You've done nothing of the sort. You'd be the first to be horrified by murder if it happened under your own nose.

RUPERT. I wonder. (*Pause.*)

LEILA. Besides, you must have *some* moral standards.

RUPERT. Must I ? I can't recall any.

LEILA. Don't be absurd. You wouldn't hurt a fly.

RUPERT. Wouldn't I ? I've hurt thousands in my time.

[*There is a pause, RUPERT and LEILA begin talking at the same time.*

LEILA. } Well, I call——
and
RUPERT. } Anyway, perhaps——

RUPERT. I beg your pardon.

LEILA. No, do go on.

RUPERT. No, do go on, please.

LEILA. No, do go on.

RUPERT. } All I was going to say——
and
LEILA. } I was merely about to——

RUPERT. I'm very sorry.

LEILA. No, do go on.

RUPERT. Shall we toss up ?

LEILA. Well, all I was going to say——

RUPERT. Yes ?

LEILA. All I was going to say is, that I call that a jolly good parcel.
(*Holds it up.*)

BRANDON. Excellent.

LEILA. Well, *now* what were you going to say ?

RUPERT. I've really no idea. . . . What are your own moral standards, then, Leila ?

LEILA. Mine ?

BRANDON. Oh, Leila believes in the Ten Commandments, doesn't she ?

RUPERT. Oh no. Surely not.

RAGLAN. Why, what's wrong with the Ten Commandments ?

RUPERT. Nothing whatever. Indeed, I have no doubt that they were of the profoundest significance to the nomadic needs of the tribe to whom they were delivered. Their inadequacy and irrelevance for to-day, though, must be sufficient to condemn them. I have often attempted to discover whether it is within the range of any of us to observe even one of them. Honour my father and mother, of course I do. How could I do otherwise ? Indeed, on the occasion of my birthday, I have never failed to send them a telegram of congratulation. Though whether this will make my days any longer in the land which has been given us must remain in doubt. But look at the others. Keep holy the Sabbath day. I don't. Take not the name of the Lord in vain. I do. Thou shalt do no murder. But I have done murder, as I have explained.

BRANDON. And the seventh, Rupert ?

RUPERT. Committed. Since infancy. (*Pause.*) Thou shalt not steal. But Property itself, as Proudhon has explained to us, is theft. And I am a man of property. Moreover, these are your matches. (*Produces box.*) Indeed the only clause I am sincerely capable of adhering to is the little stricture concerning my neighbour's ox and my neighbour's ass. Few and far between as are my neighbours who own oxes, and fewer and farther between as are my neighbours who own asses, I honestly think I could face either type, in an emergency, with a pure heart. But then it might be different if I lived in a rural district.

LEILA. Well, anyway, I still say that you'd never commit a murder. Your conscience wouldn't let you.

RUPERT. Ah, but have I a conscience ?

BRANDON. He's quite right. And for one who hasn't a conscience, I can understand murder being an entirely engrossing adventure.

RUPERT. You mean a motiveless murder ?

BRANDON. Yes.

RAGLAN. Yes. That really does happen sometimes, doesn't it ? You do get people who murder purely sort of for the fun of the thing, don't you ?

LEILA. What a peculiar idea of fun.

RAGLAN. No, but I've heard of cases like that.

RUPERT. Certainly you have. And I for one can certainly enter into the excitement of it. The only trouble about that sort of thing is that you're bound to be found out.

BRANDON (*rather too quickly*). Why should you be found out ? [*Pause*.

RUPERT. Because, dear Brandon, that sort of murder would not be a motiveless murder at all. It would have a quite clear motive. Vanity. It would be a murder of vanity. And because of that, the criminal would be quite unable to keep from talking about it, or showing it off—in *some* fantastic way or another. The trouble with that sort of murderer is that he can't keep quiet about it. He won't hide it up. He wants to boast about it—and say something—do something—it may be something only just slightly *outré*—which gives him away. They have always done it and they always will.

BRANDON. But then suppose your murderer—your really ideal, brilliantly clever and competent murderer—a genius at it, I mean—suppose he was alive to the fact that vanity was the Achilles heel to the thing, and went specially out of his way to see that he wasn't caught like that. I'm talking of a genius at it.

RUPERT (*looking at him*). Oh yes. But then he'd never be able to keep from talking about the *very* fact that he *was* so brilliantly clever, as you put it. So he'd give himself away just the same.

BRANDON. Yes. But he *might* be so clever.

RUPERT. Might. But wouldn't. (*Slight pause. Looks at him.*) Don't you think so ?

[A roll of thunder in the distance.

RAGLAN. Ah—here we are. It's coming back again.

BRANDON (*going over to window*). Lord, yes. I'm getting sick of this storm.

LEILA. Yes. So am I. I say, you know, it's really about time I ought to be going.

RAGLAN. Yes. Same here, really.

RUPERT (*drily*). What an uncanny coincidence. Now you'll both be able to go together.

[Another louder clap of thunder.

LEILA. I say—isn't it *absolutely* awful ?

RAGLAN. Isn't it terrible ? Are you really still going, you two ?

BRANDON. Certainly. It's probably only just around London. Besides—it's not so bad now. It's not raining, as a matter of fact, now, if you're thinking of getting off.

LEILA. No—that's what I thought.

RAGLAN. Same here.

RUPERT. Which is another curious coincidence.

LEILA. Oh, do shut up——

[The telephone rings.

BRANDON. Ah-ha . . . (*Goes over to telephone and sits down at it.*) Hullo. . . . Hullohullohullo. . . . Yes. . . . Mayfair X143. . . . Hullo. . . . Yes. . . .

[All are listening in complete silence.

[A clap of thunder.

BRANDON. Hullo. . . . Sorry—I can't hear. It's thundering this end. What ? Who ? Who ? Oh ! . . . Yes. Yes, rather. Will you hold the line a minute and I'll get him ? Right you are. Just hold on. (*Rises.*) Sir Johnstone. . . .

[He goes out.

[There is a silence, RAGLAN grins at LEILA. She grins back and comes down to fireplace and looks into it. RUPERT, very abruptly, rises. He hobbles over to sideboard, and pours

himself out a stiff drink. He gulps at it, takes some more, and gulps again. He seems, for the first time, rather nervous. He comes down and sits on chest. Voices heard coming from the other room and along the passage, SIR JOHNSTONE and BRANDON enter, SIR JOHNSTONE has obviously had a very satisfactory time with the books. He leaves off talking and goes cheerfully over to telephone and takes up receiver.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . Hullo, hullo. . . . *(To others.)* No one here. . . . Oh, hullo—yes ? . . . Oh yes. That you, dear ? Oh, yes ? *[The others are perfectly still.]*

SIR JOHNSTONE. Ye-e-e-es. . . . Ye-e-e-es. . . . No, no . . . he's not here. Yes, yes, that's right.

[GRANILLO and MRS. DEBENHAM enter, GRANILLO talking, but immediately sense the silence of the others, and become as quiet as them, SIR JOHNSTONE turns round and looks at them for a moment as he listens, and then turns back again.]

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes, yes. That's quite correct. Quite right, dear. . . . What ? Oh, no, no. He'll be back soon, I expect. Probably held up in the . . . What ? Oh yes, dear. Well—I'll be back there soon now. I'll be coming pretty well straight away. . . . What ? Yes. Right you are. Right you are. . . . Good-bye. *(Puts down receiver. He looks thoughtful, and suddenly a trifle older and more lonely. Pause.)* Ronald hasn't come back. . . .

RUPERT. Hasn't come back ?

SIR JOHNSTONE *(looking first at RUPERT and then in front of him)*. No. . . .

GRANILLO. Oh, that's the storm.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes. That's what it must be.

RUPERT *(acidly)*. Didn't you say he'd been to the Coliseum ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. That's right.

RUPERT. I am disliking the telephone to-night.

BRANDON. Was he expected back, then, sir ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes. Apparently he arranged to get back to tea. My wife gets so alarmed if there's any hitch.

BRANDON. He'll probably be back by the time you get home.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes . . . yes, I expect he will. (*Brightening.*) Well, we must be off. Where did we leave our hats and coats ? Oh—downstairs.

BRANDON. Yes. I'll go and get them.

[*He goes out. GRANILLO is drinking again.*]

LEILA (*to* SIR JOHNSTONE). Well—we've got your parcel all ready. (*Shows it to him.*)

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh—that is sweet of you. Thank you very much. That's a wonderful parcel, isn't it ?

LEILA. Well, it's not bad, is it ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. I should say not. Yes. . . . (*Rather listless.*) That's very convenient. . . .

[BRANDON *re-enters with* SIR JOHNSTONE'S *hat and coat.*]

BRANDON. Here you are, Sir Johnstone. And it's not raining now. (*Helping him on with it.*) But I expect you'd like a taxi, wouldn't you ?

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes. I think I'd like a taxi. I'd rather like to get back. I can't think where that boy's got to. . . . Thank you. I've never known him fail when he's said he'd be back.

BRANDON. Then he must be very filial, sir.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Yes. He is. Well, then, it only remains to thank you for the most charming evening, to say nothing of the most charming company, the company being even more delightful than the books, and that's saying an enormous amount. (*Smiles.*) Well. (*To* LEILA) Good night——

LEILA. Good night.

SIR JOHNSTONE (*to* RAGLAN). Good night.

RAGLAN. Good night, sir.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Good night, Mr. Cadell.

RUPERT. Good night, sir.

[SIR JOHNSTONE *looks at* GRANILLO, *who is having another drink.*]

SIR JOHNSTONE (*moving towards door*). And I'll have to give you something in exchange for those books, you know.

BRANDON. Never, sir.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Oh yes. You must have something back. You must have some swaps, as we used to say. You must have your swaps. Oh yes. . . .

BRANDON. Now you're forgetting them, sir.

[LEILA *brings them to him and puts them shyly and kindly into his hand*.

SIR JOHNSTONE. Ah—thank you. That won't do, will it ? Just like me. Just like me. I'm getting on, you know. I'm getting old, that's my trouble.

[*He goes out, in a rather bewildered way, followed by BRANDON, MRS. DEBENHAM smiles à farewell all round. They all murmur "Good night" and smile. She exits, GRANILLO follows them out.*

LEILA (*yawning*). Oh dear. Well—I'm going too.

RAGLAN. What part do you have to go to ?

[RUPERT *is now at window, looking out.*

LEILA. Oh—I'm South Kensingtonish.

RAGLAN. Oh, then we'll get a taxi, shall we ? And I'll drop you.

RUPERT (*coming down*). Where, then, do *you* live, Mr. Raglan ?

RAGLAN. Me ? Oh—I live up at Hampstead.

RUPERT. Oh, I see. Then it'll be quite easy to drop her.

LEILA. I wish you'd drop your sarcastic remarks.

RUPERT. Pardon, pardon. I crave your pardon. I'm always suspecting Love's Young Dream—(*he gives a ferocious blow with his stick on chest as he brings out the word "dream"*) when it's non-existent.

[BRANDON *and* GRANILLO *re-enter, GRANILLO is still staggering slightly.*

BRANDON. Well, well.

LEILA. Well—I suppose we must go now.

BRANDON. Oh—won't you stay and have another spot ?

LEILA. Oh no. I don't think so. Thanks awfully. I think I ought to be going.

RAGLAN. Yes. Same here, really.

RUPERT. Yes. I thought so.

LEILA (*to BRANDON : looking at GRANILLO reproachfully*). Well, if you're still going to-night, I certainly wouldn't let *him* drive.

GRANILLO. Whadyoumean ?

BRANDON. I will not, Leila. You may be sure. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Granillo. LEILA. He certainly ought. GRANILLO. Whadyoumean ? (*Trying to grin.*)

[RAGLAN *is looking nervous and shy.*

LEILA (*departingly*). Well ? . . .

BRANDON. Well ? . . .

RAGLAN. Well ? . . .

[*They go out. They are followed by RUPERT, who stops at door.*

RUPERT. Good night, Granillo.

GRANILLO (*again at sideboard ; turning round, as though startled*). Good night, Rupert.

[RUPERT *goes out. GRANILLO sips at another drink, and looks in front of him blankly and miserably. Staggers down stage to chair. Bangs glass down on table. Puts head in hands, BRANDON enters. He stops for a moment in doorway, with a little smile of satisfaction on his lips. He goes over to window and draws curtains to, and then to sideboard and pours himself out a drink.*

BRANDON. Well ?

GRANILLO (*from hands*). Well ?

BRANDON (*taking his drink with relish*). All's well.

[*Comes down to chest and plants his foot on it.*

GRANILLO. God ! I thought he got on to it.

BRANDON. Who ? Rupert ?

GRANILLO. Yes.

BRANDON. Yes. So did I. For a few moments. But that's what gave piquancy to the evening. He hadn't.

GRANILLO. You're sure he hadn't ?

BRANDON. Quite sure. (*Pause while he drinks.*) I sometimes rather wish he had. God. Rupert. Queer lad. I wonder. (*Reflectively.*) If he had been with us he wouldn't have got drunk, Granno.

GRANILLO (*looking up from hands*). I not drunk. . . . I'm a little blurred, that's all. (*Sits up stiffly.*) Hullo ! What's that ?

BRANDON. What ?

GRANILLO. I thought I heard something.

BRANDON. Be yourself, Granno.

GRANILLO. I thought it was the bell. (*Pause, as both listen.*)

[*The bell is heard ringing.*]

It was ! It was !

BRANDON (*finishing his drink : evenly*). Well. (*Gulp.*)

What of it ? (*Carefully finishes drink.*) I'll go down. (*He puts down the glass and goes out.*)

[*There is a long pause, GRANILLO looks in front of him steadily. Voices are heard from downstairs. Suddenly, and obviously having run up the stairs, BRANDON re-enters. Goes to mantelpiece, rather flustered.*]

BRANDON. It's Rupert. He's left his cigarette case behind, apparently. Have you seen it ?

GRANILLO. No.

BRANDON (*looking first at first table, then at chest, then at second table*). Well, it must be here somewhere.

[*RUPERT appears in doorway. He has his overcoat on, and his hat in his hand, and for a moment he is not seen. Then BRANDON sees him.*]

BRANDON. Hullo. You come up ?

RUPERT. Yes (*He slowly takes off his coat, and places it, with his hat, on the divan. Comes down stage.*)

[BRANDON *and* GRANILLO *watch him intently.*

I thought you might give me another spot. (*Sits down.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The Scene is the same as before, and no time has elapsed.

BRANDON. You're welcome, Rupert. (*Goes to sideboard.*)

RUPERT (*calmly producing cigarette case from his hip pocket and holding it up*). I beg your pardon. Humbly.

BRANDON (*from sideboard*). Why ? (*Sees.*) Oh ! You ass ! (*At soda syphon.*) Just a splash, Rupert ?

RUPERT. Yes. A generous one. (*Takes cigarette from case and lights it. Takes whisky from BRANDON, who sits on chest in centre.*) Oh, dear Heaven ! What unmentionable fatigue.

BRANDON. What ?

RUPERT. Living, living, living. I wonder if this is a way out. (*Looking at his glass.*) I shall try Omarism one day.

“The mighty Mahmud, the victorious lord,
Whom all the misbelieving and black horde
Of fears and horrors (*rather stressed*) that infest the soul,
Scatters and slays with his enchanted sword.”

Granno seems to agree with that.

BRANDON. Yes. But he's not going to get any more.

RUPERT. You're in a horrible state to-night, Granillo. You're positively silent drunk.

GRANILLO (*rising and going over to mantelpiece for cigarette*). Oh—I'm all right. (*Lights cigarette and comes back again. Is walking quite fairly steadily.*)

RUPERT. I say. Must we have all this light ?

GRANILLO. What's wrong with the light ?

RUPERT. Nothing is *wrong* with the light, Granillo. Only I am a creature of half-lights, and seeing that you have a very pleasantly shaded little table

lamp, can't we make use of it ?

BRANDON (*rising and going to lamp*). Yes. I quite agree. (*Switches it on and goes over to turn out light by door.*) But I hope you're not going to settle down *too* heavily, and make yourself *too* much at home, because we've got to be off before long. (*Light goes out and stage is lit by table lamp only.*)

RUPERT. Ah—that's better. (*Crossing his legs and leaning back.*) Much better. I am sad to-night, you know. What's the time ?

BRANDON (*looks at clock*). About five-and-twenty to eleven.

RUPERT. Five-and-twenty to eleven. I expect you're wanting to get rid of me, aren't you ?

BRANDON. Not at all, Rupert.

RUPERT. I hope not. I'm full of melancholy, and don't want to go home. . . . You must bear with me. . . . It's been such a strange evening. . . .

BRANDON. Strange evening—why ?

GRANILLO (*quickly*). Why strange ?

RUPERT. I can't tell you. That's my trouble. I suppose it's the thunder, and one thing and another. (*Drinks.*) Thunder always upsets me. Besides, I'm always melancholy at this hour. Five-and-twenty to eleven. It's a curious hour. . . . Did you ever read Goldsmith's "Nightpiece" ?

BRANDON. No. I can't actually recall it.

RUPERT. No ? You should. It's about the city at night. I shall do his "Nightpiece" up to date one of these days. And I shall make it five-and-twenty to eleven. Now. It's a wonderful hour. I am particularly susceptible to it.

BRANDON. Why so wonderful ?

RUPERT. Because it is, I think, the hour when London asks why—when it wants to know what it's all about—when the tedium of activity and the folly of pleasure are equally transparent. It is the hour in which unemployed servant girls, and the spoiled beauties of the slums, walk the streets for hire. . . . It is the hour of winking advertisement signs, and taxis, and buses, and traffic blocks. It is the hour when jaded London theatre audiences are

settling down in the darkness to the last acts of plays, of which they know the *dénouement* only too well. They know that when the curtain's down, it'll be just a question of "God Save the King," and they'll be bundled out into a chilly and possibly rainy night, where they'll have to fight for taxis, or rush for trains, or somehow transport themselves home to a cold supper and the prospect of another day to-morrow exactly similar to that which has passed. For others, further horrors are awaiting. The night clubs and cabarets have not yet begun, but they will do so very soon. . . . I could enlarge upon the idea indefinitely. Five-and-twenty to eleven. A horrible hour—a *macabre* hour, for it is not only the hour of pleasure ended, it is the hour when pleasure itself has been found wanting. There, that is what this hour means to me, and it has, moreover, been thundery. Five-and-twenty to eleven. . . .

BRANDON. Yes, Rupert, but by the time you have finished making your speech it will be eleven o'clock. In brief, my dear Rupert, you see no earthly object in living ?

RUPERT. I fear not. Do you ?

BRANDON. I ? Yes. Of course I do. But then I'm interested in things. Why don't you get interested in things ? Why don't you take up exploring, or cricket, or making love, or golf, or finance, or lecturing, or something ?

RUPERT. Or, as you suggested this evening, murder.

[*Pause.*

BRANDON. Or, as you say, murder.

[BRANDON *finishes drink and goes over to the light and switches it on.*

Now, Rupert. We don't want to turn you *out*. . . .

RUPERT. Oh, surely you're not going to do that ? Surely you're not going to spoil my mood ?

BRANDON. No. We're not going to spoil any of your moods, but we've got to get going some time. And we've got a bit of packing to do and one thing and another.

RUPERT. Oh, you really mustn't spoil my mood. I shall write something to-night if I go on like this. You can't be so cruel. Can't I have another drink ?

BRANDON (*coming down to RUPERT for his glass and taking it hack again*). Certainly, Rupert. There's no hurry whatever, Only a poetic frame of mind will hardly be induced by the spectacle of Granno and me filling suit-cases.

RUPERT. Oh, I certainly think it would. Can't I stay and watch you ?

BRANDON (*bringing down drink*). Well—we'll see You know, I believe *you're* a bit blotto to-night too, Rupert.

RUPERT. I wouldn't be surprised. (*Drinks.*) I'll tell you what—I'll stay and see you off.

[GRANILLO *rises suddenly and pours himself out another enormous drink*, BRANDON *goes over to him*.

BRANDON. That's enough of that, Granno.

GRANILLO. Mind your own business.

BRANDON. Come along, Granno. That's enough.

GRANILLO (*louder and banging glass on sideboard*). Mind your own business ! (*Comes down.*)

BRANDON (*coming down C. again*). Well, it's not my business. (*Brightly.*) Stay and see us off, Rupert ? All right. You finish that and see what you feel about it. Doesn't look as though we'll *get* off with Granno in this state.

GRANILLO. I'm perfly sober. Why does he want to stay'n see us off? That's what I want to know. Why does he want to stay'n see us off ?

BRANDON. My dear Granno. Rupert has no earthly reason in wanting to stay and see us off, and I don't know what you're talking about. There's no doing anything with you. I'm getting sick of this. Come along, Rupert, finish that up and leave him with me.

RUPERT (*pause in which he looks at him*). Oh. I've got to go, then ?

[*There is a long pause in which they both look at him.*

BRANDON (*very quietly and securely*). What do you mean, Rupert ?
You've "got to go" ?

RUPERT. Oh. Nothing. I thought for a moment that perhaps *you* wanted me to go as well.

BRANDON. Nothing of the sort. I was getting fed up with all this silly chatter, and wanted to be alone with Granno, that's all. *I don't want you to go.*

RUPERT. You don't ?

BRANDON. No.

RUPERT. All right, then. I'll stay. Can I have another drink ? (*Holds out glass.*)

GRANILLO. I said so ! I said so. . . .

BRANDON (*putting on a grin*). You're in a queer mood to-night, Rupert, too. (*Takes glass to sideboard.*)

RUPERT. No—not a queer mood. An inspired mood, rather. One has inspirations, you know. Extraordinary inspirations. And I have one to-night.

BRANDON. Oh—what's that ?

RUPERT. Ah—I'll tell you that, perhaps.

[GRANILLO *rises and goes towards window*, RUPERT *stops him on the way.*

You haven't such a thing as a pin, Granillo, have you ?

GRANILLO. A what ?

RUPERT. A pin.

GRANILLO (*feeling in his lapel*). Yes. (*Gives it him.*)

RUPERT. Thank you. (*Puts it straight into his own lapel.*)

[BRANDON *brings down RUPERT'S drink.*

Ah—thank you. (*Takes a sip.*) I shan't be long now.

BRANDON. No hurry. (*He looks at the clock, and then goes to cupboard in sideboard, and commences putting bottles and things away.*) It's past a quarter to, though. (*Yawns.*) Oh Lord, I don't feel like driving to-night after all.

RUPERT. No—there's something in the air to-night. (*He takes the Coliseum ticket from his waistcoat pocket, and very calmly pins it on the outside of his lapel.*) Did you notice Sir Johnstone's exit ? (*Touching ticket as though it were a flower.*)

BRANDON (*putting bottles away. Casually*). No—what about it ?

RUPERT. Rather subdued, I thought. (*Finishing off drink.*) And pathetic. Well, well, I must be going.

[RUPERT rises, GRANILLO is at window. BRANDON at cupboard. Neither sees him. He hesitates, and then slowly hobbles to GRANILLO at window. Opens it and leans out.

RUPERT. What's it doing ?

GRANILLO. S'better now.

[RUPERT remains at window. GRANILLO comes down to chest. He looks at BRANDON, who looks at him. They exchange a satisfied glance, GRANILLO sit, on chest, hands in pockets, reeling a little, RUPERT, who is still looking out of the window, suddenly shuts it and turns round, leans against the sill, and looks at them both. They still do not observe him. Then he hobbles down, and putting stick on chest, leans his face on his hands thoughtfully.

RUPERT. Ah, well. And so to bed.

BRANDON (*putting last bottle away, and coming a little towards RUPERT*). Well, Rupert—thank you very much for coming round and all that. . . .

RUPERT (*in same position, nodding his head*). The pleasure is mine. Mine altogether. Believe me.

[*He brings his stick down and stands properly, GRANILLO has risen, sobered completely, and is staring at him with horror.*

RUPERT. It's been a very interesting evening.

BRANDON. Hullo—what's your button-hole ?

[RUPERT *looks first at BRANDON, and then at GRANILLO. Stays perfectly still, watching GRANILLO.*

GRANILLO (*slowly and tensely*). He's got it. (*Nodding.*) He's got it.

BRANDON. Hold your tongue, Granno.

GRANILLO (*hysterically, not listening to BRANDON*). Oh yes. He's got it all right. *Ah-ah-ah-ah ! (Gives a terrible, piercing, falsetto scream, and commences banging on chest.)* He's got it ! He's got it ! He's got it !

BRANDON (*shouting even louder and simultaneously. Shaking him*). Hold your tongue ! Hold your tongue ! Hold your filthy tongue !

GRANILLO (*groaning and staggering against chest*). Oh—oh—oh. (*Gives a low, long drawn-out, shuddering sob.*)

[RUPERT *has hobbled down R.*

BRANDON (*with restrained violence*). Hold your row ! Hold your row ! (*Comes in the direction of RUPERT. Stops.*) Rupert.

RUPERT. Yes.

[GRANILLO *has now sunk down beside the chest, still sobbing and breathing hard.*

BRANDON. Rupert. This is nothing to do with you. Granno and I have a certain trouble between us which concerns no one else. Will you kindly oblige us by going at once and leaving us to it ?

RUPERT (*looking down at his stick*). Won't you tell me your trouble, Brandon ? I might be able to help.

BRANDON. No. I will not tell you our trouble. (*Moves towards door.*) Please go. It's nothing to do with you.

RUPERT (*still looking down at stick*). No, Brandon, it may not be anything to do with me. But it may possibly be something to do with—with the public in general—and I'm its only representative in this room. Won't you tell me ?

[BRANDON *comes forward menacingly, and, to his surprise, RUPERT comes forward to meet him.*

BRANDON. Are you going, or are you not ?

*[They glare into each other's eyes. Slow moan from GRANILLO.
Pause.]*

RUPERT. No, Brandon, I'm not going. You see, I'm rather awkwardly situated. . . .

BRANDON *(more menacingly still—a change in his tone)*. You are something more than that, my friend.

RUPERT *(holding his ground, a trifle breathless)*. Oh—how's that ?

BRANDON. You are very dangerously situated.

[Comes suddenly forward, RUPERT retreats, putting up his stick to protect himself, BRANDON seizes it without the slightest difficulty, and brings it down to a horizontal level. Each is holding firmly to it and gazing at the other.]

BRANDON. Very dangerously situated, indeed.

RUPERT *(after a pause)*. Brandon. I am lame, and I have no protection.

BRANDON. You have not. RUPERT. Save that of my foresight.

BRANDON. Your foresight ?

[There is a flash of steel, as the blade is withdrawn from the stick. It is a swordstick. BRANDON is left with the empty wooden sheath in his hand.]

RUPERT. But this is a compensation as well as an encumbrance. *(He is hobbling sideways up stage quickly, with the sword between him and them.)* Besides, I have here another little weapon, which is of even greater value to me. *(Produces a little silver whistle.)*

BRANDON. What's that ?

RUPERT. This ? *(Holding it up.)* A whistle. A policeman gave it to me.

[BRANDON walks rapidly over to him. RUPERT puts himself in a defensive position, BRANDON pauses, and then goes over to pour himself out a drink.]

BRANDON *(quite calm)*. Oh ! And when did he give you that ?

RUPERT. He gave it to me twenty minutes ago. Before I came back—for my cigarette case. He is now waiting for me to use it. He is waiting at the corner. It depends upon you whether I shall use it or not.

BRANDON. What do you want from me, Rupert ?

RUPERT. I want two things—two truths. I want the truth about this ticket here (*tears it off*), and the truth about that chest there—or rather its contents.

BRANDON. I can satisfy you on both. As for the ticket, I know nothing whatever about it. As for the chest, I simply do not know what you mean.

RUPERT. You have succeeded in satisfying me on neither.

BRANDON (*coming a little towards him*). Rupert, I have come to the conclusion that you are hopelessly drunk, and that you had better go home.

RUPERT. It is possible that I am drunk—but not hopelessly. And I am not going home.

BRANDON. What is all this about ? What is all this maudlin suspiciousness ?

RUPERT. This is not maudlin suspiciousness, Brandon. It is well-founded. From the first moment, when I telephoned this house at a quarter to nine, and heard, over the wire, your friend there (*pointing to GRANILLO*) crying for the dark, the suspicion was there. And that suspicion has been growing ever since.

BRANDON. Growing ever since ! Growing ever since ! What do you mean ? What do you suspect ?

RUPERT. I suspect murder, Brandon. The murder of Ronald Kentley.

BRANDON. Rupert. Have you gone mad ?

RUPERT. I dare say so. Perhaps you will prove that I nave.

BRANDON. You suspect *what*, did you say ?

RUPERT. Murder, Brandon.

BRANDON (*feigning relief*). Oh, my God ! My poor, poor Rupert ! You don't know how you've relieved me. I imagined you'd got on to the real truth, which'd have been devilish awkward. Murder ! Oh dear, that's good. (*To GRANILLO on ground.*) Hear that, Granno. He suspects us of murder ! Murder ! Isn't that too rich ?

RUPERT. Is it possible that you are trying to bluff me ?

BRANDON. Bluff you—you drunken sot and maniac ! Bluff you ! Get on out of here ! Blow your whistle ! Blow your whistle, and bring your policeman in ! Get on out ! Do what you like !

RUPERT. Ah—perhaps I am insane, then. But since you say I can do what I like, may I see the inside of that chest ?

BRANDON. See the inside of that chest ! See the inside of that chest ! You can see the inside of fifty thousand chests ! Get on out !

RUPERT (*very calmly*). I did not ask to see the inside of fifty thousand chests, Brandon, but to see the inside of that specific chest. And I cannot do that if I have to “get on out.”

BRANDON. You’re mad and drunk !

RUPERT. Possibly. Nevertheless, may I look inside that chest ?

BRANDON (*shouting*). YES !

[There is a tremendous and baffling silence, RUPERT hobbles down L., and pauses to look at him in a puzzled way. Then hobbles towards window and looks at him in the same way. He comes down C. Pause.]

RUPERT. Very well. I will.

[Another pause as they look at each other, BRANDON is fairly near to chest.]

BRANDON. Go on. What are you waiting for ?

RUPERT. You’re very clever, Brandon, in any case.

BRANDON. I wish I could say the same of you, you fantastic ass. (*Advancing a little.*)

RUPERT. Will you get farther away, please ? Will you go down to that chair ? (*He points to chair R. with sword.*)

[BRANDON obeys, RUPERT pauses. Goes to chest. GRANILLO is still prostrate, RUPERT examines lock, and tries to lift lid.]

It’s locked—padlocked. (*He sits easily on edge of chest.*)

BRANDON. What of it ?

RUPERT. Where's the key ?

BRANDON. I don't know. Why should I know ? It's upstairs, I think.

RUPERT. Upstairs ?

BRANDON. Yes. Shall I go and get it ?

RUPERT (*rising*). No. Don't do that. (*Goes over to sideboard and picks up silver nutcrackers.*) I can force it. (*Comes down again, looking at others.*) Must I do this ?

[*No answer from BRANDON.*

Must. I do this ?

BRANDON (*suddenly blazing*). Here's your key ! Here's your key ! (*Fishing in waistcoat pocket and flinging it down.*) Now look—and get what's coming to you !

RUPERT. Thank you.

[RUPERT *picks it up and begins to fumble with lock.* BRANDON *leaps forward, but RUPERT is too quick for him. He swings round into a sitting posture on the chest, and has his sword pointed at the other's breast.*

BRANDON. You'll be sorry if you look in there, Cadell ! You'll be sorry.

RUPERT. I'll take the risk. Will you go back to that chair ?

[BRANDON *obeys, RUPERT goes on fumbling. He unlocks it. He pauses before opening, and looks at BRANDON. Then he slowly lifts the lid and looks in. Long pause. Suddenly the lid comes down with a smash, RUPERT literally runs, in so far as his lameness will allow him, towards the door. The thing has obviously appalled him more than he could have imagined. He turns round and runs in the same way up stage, C. There he stops, completely overcome.*

RUPERT. Oh—you swine. . . . (*Wipes his hand across his mouth, his lips at once contemptuous and horror-struck.*) You dirty swine. . . . (*Gives a shuddering sob.*)

BRANDON (*quietly*). Now then, Rupert. Sit down. I want to talk to you.

RUPERT. Poor Ronald Kentley. . . . What had he done to you ? (*Comes down a little.*)

BRANDON. Sit down, Rupert. For God's sake sit down. I want to talk to you.

RUPERT (*pulling himself together*). Sit down, Brandon ? What do you mean ?

BRANDON (*louder. He is himself standing*). Sit down ! For God's sake sit down and listen. I want to explain !

RUPERT. Explain ?

BRANDON (*slightly giving way*). Oh, sit down. For God's sake sit down ! I'm at your mercy, I tell you, I'm at your mercy. Have mercy on me ! I can explain !

Have mercy on me ! Sit down and judge me ! Sit down and judge me !

[RUPERT *slowly comes and sits down L.*

RUPERT. Well ?

[BRANDON *paces up towards window before sitting down. Sits down C. Thinks. Puts face in hands.*

BRANDON. Rupert. You're an enlightened man, aren't you ?

RUPERT. I profess to be. Yes.

BRANDON. And it is in your power to have me—hanged.

RUPERT. So it seems.

BRANDON. And Granillo too.

RUPERT. And Granillo too.

BRANDON. Rupert.

RUPERT. Yes.

BRANDON. You remember our talk to-night—about the Old Bailey and justice ?

RUPERT. Yes. Well.

BRANDON. And the difference between the two. You made the point.

RUPERT. Yes.

BRANDON. Yes. Well. Remember that. You wouldn't be giving us up to justice. And now I want to ask you something else. You are not a man of morals, are you ?

RUPERT. No. I'm not.

BRANDON. And you do not rate life as a very precious thing, do you ?

RUPERT. No.

BRANDON. Now listen, Rupert. Listen. I have done this thing. I and Granno. We have done it together. We have done it for—for adventure. For adventure and danger. For danger. You read Nietzsche, don't you, Rupert ?

RUPERT. Yes.

BRANDON. And you know that he tells us to live dangerously.

RUPERT. Yes.

BRANDON. And you know that he's no more respect for individual life than you, and tells us—to—live dangerously. We thought we would do so—that's all. We have done so. We have only *done* the thing. Others have talked. We have done. Do you understand ?

RUPERT. Go on.

BRANDON. Listen, Rupert, listen. You're understanding, I think. You're the one man to understand. Now apart from all that—quite apart—even if you can't see how we—look at it, you'll see that you can't give us up. Two lives can't recall one. It'd just be triple murder. You would never allow that. But apart from that too—our lives are in your hands. Your hands, man ! I give them into your hands. You can't kill us. You can't kill. If you have us up now, it'd be killing us as much as if you were to run us through with that sword in your hand. You're not a murderer, Rupert.

RUPERT. What are you ?

BRANDON. We aren't, we *aren't*, I tell you ! Don't tell me you're a slave of your period. In the days of the Borgias you'd have thought nothing of this. For God's sake tell me you're an emancipated man. Rupert, you can't give us up. You know you can't. You can't. You can't ! You can't. . . . (*Long pause.*) Can you ?

[*Pause.*

RUPERT. Yes, I know. There's every truth in what you've said. This is a very queer, dark and incomprehensible universe, and I understand it little. I myself have always tried to apply pure logic to it, and the application of logic can lead us into strange passes. It has done so in this case. You have brought up my own words in my face, and a man should stand by his own words. I shall never trust in logic again. You have said that I hold life cheap. You're right. I do. Your own included. (*Rises.*)

BRANDON. What do you mean ?

RUPERT (*suddenly letting himself go—a thing he has not done all the evening, and which he now does with tremendous force, and clear, angry articulation*). What do I mean ? What do I mean ? I mean that you have taken and killed—by strangulation—a very harmless and helpless fellow-creature of twenty years. I mean that in that chest there—now lie the staring and futile remains of something that four hours ago lived, and laughed, and ran, and found it good. Laughed as you could never laugh, and ran as you could never run. I mean that, for your cruel and scheming pleasure, you have committed a sin and a blasphemy against that very life which you now find yourselves so precious. And you have done more than this. You have not only killed him; you have rotted the lives of all those to whom he was dear. And you have brought worse than death to his father—an equally harmless old man who has fought his way quietly through to a peaceful end, and to whom the whole Universe, after this, will now be blackened and distorted beyond the limits of thought. That is what you have done. And in dragging him round here to-night, you have played a lewd and infamous jest upon him—and a bad jest at that. And if you think, as your type of philosopher generally does, that all life is nothing but a bad jest, then you will now have the pleasure of seeing it played upon yourselves.

BRANDON (*pale and frozen*). What are you saying ? What are you doing ?

RUPERT. It is not what *I* am doing, Brandon. It is what society is going to do. And what will happen to you at the hands of society I am not in a position to tell you. That's its own business. But I can give you a pretty

shrewd guess, I think. (*Coming forward to chest and swinging back the lid.*)
You are going to hang, you swine ! Hang !—both of you !—*hang* !

[Has whistle in hand. Runs hobbling to the window, throws it open, leans out, and sends three piercing whistles into the night.]

CURTAIN FALLS.

THE END.